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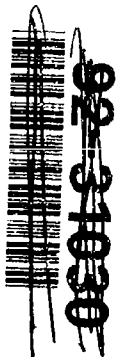
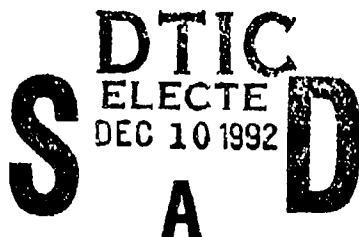
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# Family Separations in the Army

Kathleen W. Coolbaugh and Alvin Rosenthal  
Caliber Associates

October 1992



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13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) <p>This report examines the impact of separations on Army soldiers and their families and the role of Army programs in providing separation support. The data for the report are from a 1989 Armywide survey of a probability sample of 11,035 soldiers in 528 active component Army units and 3,277 Army spouses. The report examines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The nature and extent of separation experienced by Army soldiers and their families, and</li> <li>• The nature of separation problems and worries experienced and the family characteristics of those who experience them. Enlisted personnel experience the highest rates of family separation and are the most likely to report related problems.</li> </ul>				
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**Technical Report 964**

## **Family Separations in the Army**

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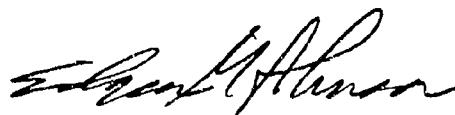
## FOREWORD

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The Army Family Research Program (AFRP) began in November 1986 as an integrated research project mandated by both the CSA White Paper, 1983: The Army Family and the annual Army Family Action Plans (1984 to present). The object of the research is to support the Army Family Action Plans and Army family programs and policies by (1) determining the demographic characteristics of Army families, (2) identifying motivators and detractors to soldiers remaining in the Army, (3) developing methods to increase family adaptation to Army life, and (4) increasing operational readiness.

The AFRP research is being conducted by the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) with the assistance of Research Triangle Institute, Caliber Associates, HumRRO, and Decision Sciences Consortium, Inc. It is funded by Army research and development funds set aside for this purpose under Management Decision Package (1U6S).

This report presents the results of analyses of family separations experienced by soldiers and families and of programs that help moderate the effects of these Army-related separations. The findings presented in this report were briefed to the Community and Family Support Center (CFSC) on 7 November 1991 and will drive program design and service delivery for separated families. They are being used to weigh current policies and procedures used in the field.



EDGAR M. JOHNSON  
Technical Director

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Finally, we acknowledge the contribution of the Army soldiers and families who participated in the Army Family Research Program (AFRP) survey. Their willingness to participate and the thoughtful responses they provided were crucial to the success of this effort.

## **FAMILY SEPARATIONS IN THE ARMY**

### **Summary**

The Army Family Research Program (AFRP) began in November 1986 as an integrated research project that was mandated by both the CSA White Paper, 1983: The Army Family and the annual Army Family Action Plans (1984 to present). The object of the research is to support the Army Family Action Plans and Army family programs and policies by (1) determining the demographic characteristics of Army families, (2) identifying motivators and detractors to soldiers remaining in the Army, (3) developing methods to increase family adaptation to Army life, and (4) increasing operational readiness. This report presents the results of analyses on family separations experienced by soldiers and families.

The report includes a review of the literature on military separations from Hill's seminal work in 1945 after WWII up to and including preliminary reports from Operations Desert Shield/Storm. Most military separation literature, however, deals with "long and dangerous" separations, e.g., WWII, Viet Nam, the Sinai peacekeeping force, etc. Because of the time frame in which the data for this report were collected, none of the separations reported was likely to have had a serious risk of combat associated with them. The nature of these separations, therefore, may not be fully consistent with those described in the literature.

This research focused on determining the nature and extent of family separations in the Army and identifying the family characteristics associated with various aspects of separations. Research questions in five key areas were investigated:

1. How many Army families experience what types of Army-related separations? What military and family characteristics are associated with what types of separations?
2. What is the "preparation status" of Army families before separations, and to what extent does it affect how much soldiers and spouses worry or have trouble coping during separations?

3. Who worries during separations? What family characteristics are associated with soldiers and spouses who report more separation worries and coping problems? Also, who copes *well* during separations?
4. What is the extent of "reentry" adjustment problems after the soldier returns? What characteristics are associated with soldiers and spouses having trouble adapting to each other after the separation?
5. What is the impact of support systems, both formal and informal, in mitigating separation stress? What is the Army's role in supporting soldiers and families during separations? Are Army separation programs and services perceived as useful? To what extent are they used? What is the impact of community and social support systems?

### Methods

The data used in this report are from the 1989 Army Soldier and Family Surveys which were collected as part of the AFRP, conducted under contract with the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. The survey was carried out by a contractor team led by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and included Caliber Associates, Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), and Decision Sciences Consortium, Inc. (DSC).

The report is based on survey responses from a probability sample of 11,035 soldiers and 3,345 spouses serving in 528 active component units in 34 geographical locations in CONUS and OCONUS. Survey data were collected from February to October, 1989. Among these soldiers, a sub-sample of 6,203 male soldiers married to civilians was created for the analyses on family separations. Responses from this group, along with a matched set of 2,808 spouse questionnaires, form the basis for the findings presented in the report. All analyses were completed using SUDAAN software, a statistical program that takes into account the complex sample design in estimating variances. In general, three types of analyses were used to prepare this report: one way analysis of variance, regression analysis, and crosstabulations. Two exploratory models also were tested using multiple regression analysis. Results of analyses significant at  $p < .01$  are reported.



The AFRP Soldier and Spouse Surveys were designed to collect data for analyses of the combined effects of soldier, family, unit, and other factors on key Army outcomes such as soldier retention, readiness, and family adaptation to the demands of Army life. The Soldier Survey contains 164 questions, many of which have multiple parts, for a total of 449 items. Data were collected on the soldier's background, work and unit environment, readiness (both individual and unit), Army attitudes and values, personal and family relationships, retention and career plans, attitudes toward Army support programs and services, and use of these programs and services. The Spouse Survey contained 97 questions, many of which mirrored soldier questions. Both instruments included several questions devoted to the subject of family separations. Two scales based on survey items were developed to measure the extent to which soldiers and spouses worry while the soldier is "away on Army assignment, TDY, or deployment." These scales, used in a number of analyses throughout the report, are based on the following questions:

<u><b>Soldier Separation Anxiety Scale</b></u>	<u><b>Spouse Separation Anxiety Scale</b></u>
Here is a list of feelings or worries some soldiers have about their family (their spouse, children) when they are away on Army assignment, TDY or deployment. How often do you worry about each of the following <u>when you are away?</u>	Here is a list of feelings or worries some spouses have when their husband/wife is away on Army assignment, TDY, or deployment. Please indicate how often you experience each of the following <u>when your spouse is away?</u>
Your family's safety	Concern over your ability to cope with stress
Your family's ability to get car or household repairs done	Difficulty maintaining a positive attitude
Your family having enough money to meet expenses, pay bills, etc.	Worry about your own safety
Your family's safety in the event of war.	Loneliness
	Fear that your spouse will be involved in combat

## Results

The results section of the report is organized into four major sections:

- The relationship between family separation and key Army outcomes, such as family adaptation to Army life, soldier retention and soldier readiness (provided as an overview to some of the linkages between family separations and these key Army outcomes).
- Separation activity, which describes the nature and extent of separations soldiers and their families experience in the Army (related to the first set of research questions listed above).
- Family separation coping issues, with sections addressing issues "before, during, and after" the separation, as well as overall assessments of the separation experience (related to the second, third, and fourth sets of research questions).
- The role of formal and informal support systems in helping families cope with separations (related to the fifth area of research questions).

Each section is summarized below.

### The relationship between family separation and key Army outcomes.

Although the primary purpose of this report is to describe the extent and nature of family separations, this section provides a brief discussion of how separations appear to relate to three key Army outcomes: family adaptation to the demands of Army life, retention, and readiness.

Separation anxiety scores for both soldiers and spouses were significantly correlated with scores on the Family Adaptation Scale, a composite scale based on several items from the AFRP survey (Army-family fit, spouse support for the Army, and family adjustment to the Army) used to measure that adjustment. Though not strong, the statistically significant correlations suggest that soldier/family separations, among many factors, do play a role in families' ability to adapt to Army life. Moreover, a significant relationship also was found between this scale

and spouses' overall assessment of a recent extended separation, suggesting that families which were better adapted to Army life tended to handle separations well.

The relationship between separation worries and retention desires or plans was less definitive. No significant correlation was found between the soldier or spouse separation anxiety scale scores and the *soldier's* stated likelihood of staying in the Army at the end of his current obligation. A small but significant relationship was found, however, between spouse separation anxiety scores and the question, "At the present time, do you want your spouse to stay in the Army or leave the Army at the end of his current obligation?" This relationship suggests that the greater the separation worries experienced by the spouse, the more likely she is to favor her husband *leaving* the Army at the end of his current obligation.

Similarly, spouses who reported having handled their last extended separation experience "somewhat well" or "very well" were considerably more likely to view an Army career favorably than were spouses who did less well with their last separation. To the extent that spouses influence the soldier's decision to stay in the Army, and the retention research suggests they do (Griffith et al., 1991), it would appear to be beneficial for the Army to help ensure that spouses, particularly those of junior enlisted soldiers, experience separations positively.

With respect to readiness, it is reasonable to assume that if a deployed soldier is preoccupied with worries about his family, his performance and ability to function may suffer. Small but significant relationships were found between soldier separation anxiety scores and supervisor readiness ratings. In addition to the individual readiness ratings which were collected from supervisors, soldiers were asked, "If we were to go to war today, how well prepared are you to perform the tasks in your wartime job?" This self-assessment of readiness was correlated with separation anxiety scores with the same results: statistically significant but low correlations.

These analyses suggest that in all probability, separations can play a role in how the family experiences and adapts to the Army; that the family's separation experience can influence the spouse's support for her husband's retention; and

that the extent to which the soldier worries about his family's well-being while away from home may, in some circumstances, affect his job performance and readiness for war.

**Separation activity.** This section of the report describes the nature and extent of separations reported by the sub-sample of male soldiers married to civilians. Data on three types of separations are provided: (1) "long term" separations, where the family is voluntarily separated for a full tour of duty or the soldier is on an unaccompanied tour, (2) short, "overnight" stays away from home, and (3) "extended" separations defined in the survey instrument as one month or longer. "Overnight" and "extended" separations were reported for couples residing at the same location. Overall, 91.7% of married male soldiers reported living at the same location with their spouse; 2.1% were on unaccompanied tours; 6.2% of couples were voluntarily separated. The table below presents the couples' living status by soldier rank.

**Table 1**  
**Soldier/Spouse Residential Status by Rank**

	Soldier Rank					
	PVT-CPL	SGT-SSG	SFC-SGM	WO1-WO4	2LT-CPT	MAJ-COL
	<u>N = 61,798</u>	<u>N = 86,579</u>	<u>N = 32,635</u>	<u>N = 7,514</u>	<u>N = 15,267</u>	<u>N = 15,584</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b><i>Soldier/Spouse/Living Status</i></b>						
Couple Living Together	87.2	92.7	92.0	94.7	97.0	97.3
Couple Not Living Together						
- Soldier on Unaccompanied Tour	2.6	2.0	3.0	0.5	0.5	0.6
- Couple Voluntarily Separated	10.2	5.4	5.0	4.7	2.5	2.1

"N" = estimated soldier population

Among the married soldiers who reported being on unaccompanied tours, almost all (95.5%) were enlisted personnel (the estimated proportion of enlisted

soldiers in the population overall is 87.2%). Voluntarily separated couples also were predominantly represented by enlisted personnel (92.2%), the majority of whom are *junior* enlisted. The type of unit (i.e., combat, combat support, combat service support, and TDA) was not significantly related to soldier residential status although unit location (CONUS, Europe, or other OCONUS) was: the majority of unaccompanied soldiers were in Europe; the majority of voluntarily separated soldiers were in CONUS assignments, as were couples residing together. In addition, several family characteristics differed: *separated* soldiers tended to have been married for a shorter period of time, were more likely to have no children, and their spouses were more likely to have been employed full time.

Soldiers residing with their wives reported the number of nights over the last six months they were "away from home on overnight Army duty." Approximately 90% of the soldiers reported having been away at least one night, and more than half (58%) were away in excess of 15 nights during the six-month period. The table below summarizes "overnight" separation activity by rank.

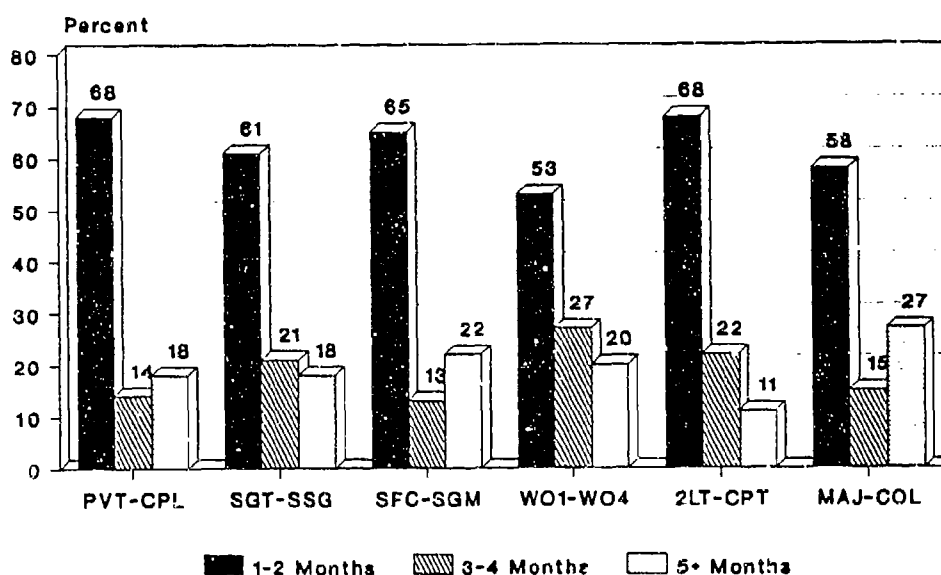
**Table 2**  
**"Overnight" Separation Activity During Past 6 Months By Rank**

	Soldier Rank					
	<u>PVT-CPL</u>	<u>SGT-SSG</u>	<u>SFC-SGM</u>	<u>WO1-WO4</u>	<u>2LT-CPT</u>	<u>MAJ-COL</u>
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<u># Nights Away</u>						
0	8.2	10.6	21.0	6.8	8.6	13.6
1 - 7	13.4	16.1	18.8	6.6	11.6	17.6
8 - 15	12.5	14.0	14.3	27.3	16.4	23.4
16 - 30	22.0	18.0	10.0	30.3	22.9	24.7
31 +	43.9	40.3	30.0	29.0	40.6	20.7

Senior NCOs and officers were the most likely to be able to stay home; junior enlisted soldiers were the most likely to be gone the longest. "Overnight" separation activity varied significantly by type of unit (combat units were most likely to be away, TDA the least), though not by unit location.

Overall, approximately 37% of soldiers and spouses who live together reported an extended separation (one month or longer) during the previous year. Enlisted personnel in ranks Corporal to Staff Sergeant reported the highest rates of extended separation, and field grade officers the lowest. The length of the extended separations experienced by soldiers in the various rank categories is presented in the Figure below.

**FIGURE 1**  
**LENGTH OF LAST EXTENDED SEPARATION**  
**BY RANK**



Soldiers in combat support units were most likely to report having had an extended separation in the past year and those in TDA units the least likely. Length of the extended separation also varied significantly by type of unit: TDA units were more likely than all others to have long separations (five months or longer), while soldiers in combat units were the least likely to be away so long. Unit location was not significantly related to extended separation activity.

In summary, family separations are wide-spread and largely indiscriminate in the Army: almost all soldiers experience a separation of some form in a given six-month period. Long-term separations (unaccompanied tours and those done

voluntarily) affect only about 8% of married male soldiers, but are experienced disproportionately by young enlisted personnel. Among soldiers who were living with their wives, about 90% were away for at least one night over a six-month period, and the majority were away more than two weeks. Extended separations of a month or longer during the past year were reported by more than a third of the soldiers living with their spouses. Most of these separations were less than three months, but among the lower officer and enlisted ranks, a third or more were gone for more than three months. Because so many of those affected by all of the types of separations are junior, the affected families tend to be young as well.

Family separation coping issues. This section presents findings from a series of analyses organized around the three stages of a separation: before, during, and after. It also includes analyses of spouses' overall assessment of their last extended separation experience and presents soldiers' and spouses' projections about coping with future separations.

"Before" the separation looks at three measures of the couple's "preparedness" to deal with separations: whether or not the spouse has a power of attorney, a joint checking account, and the equivalent of two weeks of the soldier's pay available in case of emergency. Overall, more than half of all couples have a power of attorney for the spouse in case the soldier is away. Joint checking accounts are more common across all ranks and the availability of emergency cash varied widely by rank. The percent of soldiers having at least two weeks of pay in savings varied from about 90% for field grade officers to less than 50% for the junior enlisted. Of these preparedness measures, joint checking account and emergency cash were significantly related to reduced soldier worry as measured by the Soldier Separation Anxiety Scale, and for spouse, only emergency cash was associated with lower separation anxiety ( $p < .035$ ).

"During" the separation examines the relationship between the two Separation Anxiety Scales and 11 independent variables.<sup>1</sup> For both soldiers and

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<sup>1</sup> Soldier rank, unit location, age of youngest child, number of children, presence of children with problems, spouse employment status, on- or off-post housing, length of marriage, money problems, length of last extended separation, length of time at current location.

spouses there were small but significant differences in the mean anxiety scale scores for groups formed by the following variables: soldier rank, age of youngest child, spouse employment status, length of marriage, money problems, length of time at current location. In general, where there are very young children in the family, or the spouse is not employed full time, or the couple has not been married very long, or there have been problems paying the bills in at least one of the past 12 months, or the couple is newly arrived at a location, separation worries will tend to increase. The strongest relationship and most meaningful differences, however, were for soldier rank. The figure on the following page displays both Soldier and Spouse Separation Anxiety Scale scores by soldier rank categories.<sup>2</sup> The figure portrays a steady decline in separation anxiety with a rise in rank. So consistent is the decline as rank rises that it does not detour for junior officers. Similarly, for soldiers with children, the extent to which they worry about their children when they are away varied by rank, age of youngest child, length of marriage, money problems, and length of time at current location.

Spouses who had experienced a recent extended separation were asked a short series of questions related to it. The table, on page xxiii, summarizes their responses to the question, "To what extent did you experience the following with your last separation?"

Relationships between these items and the 11 independent variables noted above were tested; only one significant relationship was found between the "trouble with children" item and "presence [in the family] of child(ren) with problems." Spouse responses to these and other questions suggest that overall, the last extended separation was not viewed as a major problem for the majority of spouses.

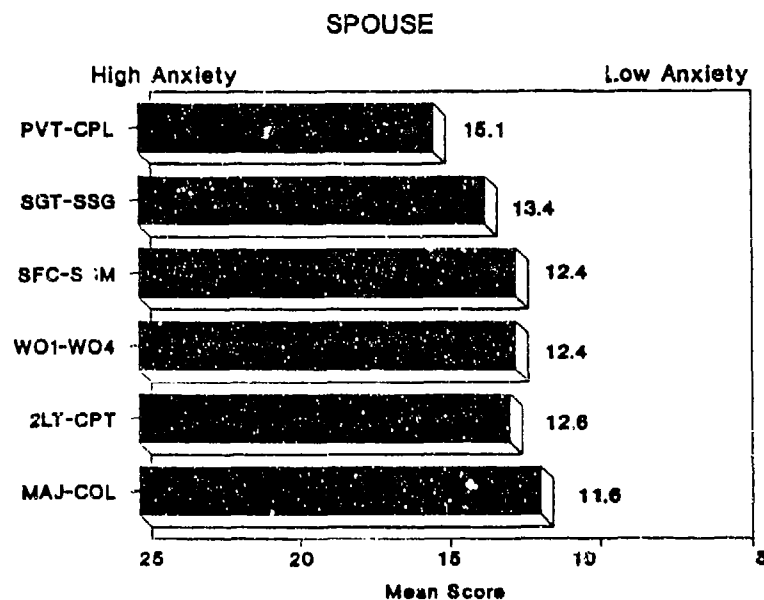
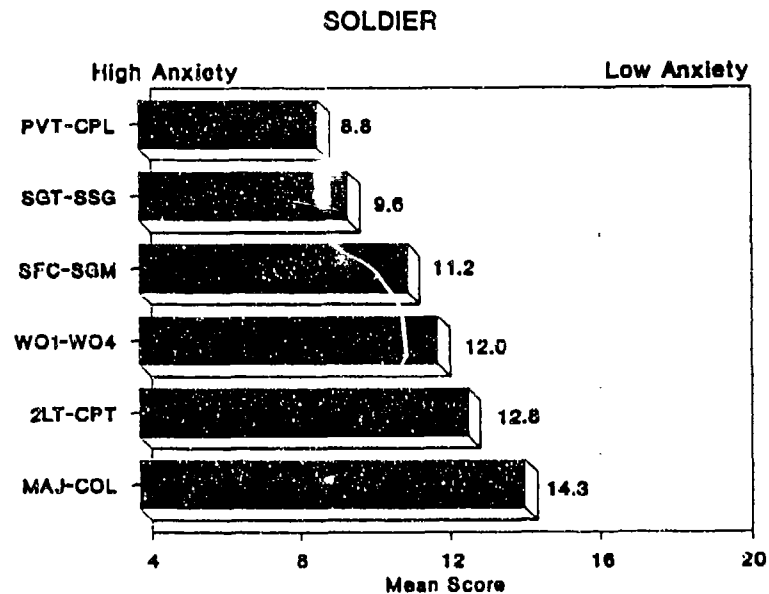
Soldiers reported being proud of the way their spouses handled things while they were away, and the majority felt their spouses, to some extent, had become more independent during the last separation. Moreover, for soldiers, unlike

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<sup>2</sup> The Soldier and Spouse Separation Anxiety Scales differ in three important ways: i) they are inverted; for soldiers, a higher score means lower anxiety; for spouses, a lower score means lower anxiety; ii) the soldier scale ranges from 4 to 20, the spouse scale from 5 to 25; and iii) the items on the scales are different.



**FIGURE 2**  
**SOLDIER AND SPOUSE SEPARATION ANXIETY**  
**MEAN SCALE SCORES**



• Soldier anxiety scores on a scale from 4 to 20  
 • Spouse anxiety scores on a scale from 5 to 25

spouses, the length of the last extended separation influenced the extent to which they reported their wives had become more independent, longer separations being associated with greater change.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution Of Spouse Responses To Four Aspects Of Separation**

<u>Response</u>	<u>QUESTION</u>			
	<u>Became More Independent</u>	<u>Trouble with Children</u>	<u>Trouble Making Decisions Alone</u>	<u>Soldier Proud Upon Return</u>
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Very great extent	14.3	7.0	1.9	38.8
Great extent	25.6	11.4	3.2	32.1
Moderate extent	24.9	22.5	9.9	15.5
Slight extent	18.1	24.2	18.6	9.3
Not at all	17.1	35.0	66.4	4.2

"After" the separation deals with the extent to which the couple had trouble adapting to each other after the soldier's return and the spouse's overall assessment of how well she handled the last separation experience. Overall, spouses who experienced a recent extended separation did not report having a difficult time adapting to their husbands' return. Roughly 40% of the wives said it took no time at all to adapt to each other after his return. Only 16% reported that the readjustment took time "to a very great" or "great extent." Soldiers, on the other hand, felt it took a little longer to adapt after their return. While 25% reported no problem at all, nearly double the percent of soldiers (30%) than spouses (16%) reported that it took time "to a very great" or "great extent." The length of the last separation, both the soldier's and spouse's assessment of her changed independence, overall happiness of the marriage, and whether or not the couple had experienced trouble paying their bills in any of the last 12 months all were significantly related to how long it took the couple to re-adapt after the separation.

In a multiple regression analysis of the spouse question about time to adapt after the last separation, five variables explained 30.1% of the variance in the dependent variable: problems making decisions alone during the last separation, overall happiness of the marriage, problems with the children, length of last separation, and the extent to which the spouse became more independent. These results suggest that for spouses, it will take less time to adapt to each other after the soldier returns when she doesn't experience too many problems making decisions alone during the separation, has a generally happy marriage, and does not experience too many child-related problems while the soldier is away. In addition, when the separation is shorter, and when she becomes more independent *to a lesser extent* or not at all during the separation, time to adapt is reduced.

Overall spouses felt they handled their last separation experience quite successfully: 81.6% of them said they handled the separation either "very well" or "somewhat well." Fewer than one in ten thought they handled it poorly. Soldier rank was related to the spouses' assessment. In general, spouses of field grade officers reported the best overall handling of it, while junior enlisted spouses, in general, did less well.

An exploratory multiple regression analysis on the spouse question of overall assessment of the separation experience resulted in three significantly related independent variables: soldier rank, the extent to which the spouse had trouble with the children, and the extent to which she understands the demands of the soldier's Army job. This model suggests that the higher the soldier's rank, the more the spouse understands the demands of his job, and the fewer problems she has with the children during the separation, the better she will experience the separation. From a practical standpoint, these results suggest that the Army may realize a considerable payoff in ensuring that spouses do understand and appreciate the demands of the soldier's Army job. To the extent that this understanding potentially reduces her resentment (or increases her acceptance) of extended separations, and they are more positively experienced overall, both the family and the Army benefit.

Predictions of the spouses' future separation coping ability were made by both soldiers and spouses, and soldier rank was significantly correlated for both. Junior enlisted soldiers thought their spouses would have the most trouble coping, as did the spouses themselves. Soldiers, however, were somewhat more pessimistic than spouses about how much of a problem they would have. Senior personnel, both officers and enlisted soldiers and their spouses, had higher scores on the coping measures. There was a fairly strong positive relationship between the spouse question, "Overall, how would you say you handled this separation experience" and predictions of future separation coping, suggesting that spouses who have had a generally successful recent separation anticipate less trouble coping with future separations.

The role of formal and informal support systems. This section of the report examines the role of formal support systems (i.e., programs the Army offers and the chain of command itself) and informal support systems (a network of friends and family the spouse can rely on while the soldier is away) during family separations. Responses to questions about the actual use of and usefulness for the Army to provide "services for families separated from the soldier" and "programs for spouses during TDYs/ deployments/mobilizations" revealed that very few soldiers and spouses had used these types of services at their current location, but the vast majority thought it useful for the Army to provide them. Lacking specific information on which separation programs/services soldiers and their spouses value and use, it is difficult to reach definitive conclusions about the service-use items. In general, however, it is clear that both soldiers and spouses believe it is useful for the Army to provide separation-related services to families when the soldier is away.

The extent to which unit leaders are viewed to be supportive of families was significantly associated with reduced separation worries while the soldier is away, for both soldiers and spouses. Similarly, the more unit leaders are perceived to be supportive of families, both the soldiers and spouses predict fewer separation coping problems for the spouse in future separations. Unit leaders' attitudes were more strongly correlated with soldier separation measures than with spouses'. (Soldiers also rated unit leaders somewhat more attuned to family needs than did spouses.)

Informal support systems also play a role in sustaining families during separations. The existence of a close friend or relative and the extent to which soldiers and spouses believed there was someone they could count on to help out with a problem both were associated with reduced separation worries and predictions of fewer spouse problems coping with future separations.

### **Conclusions and Implications for the Army**

The data from the analyses presented in this report indicate that family separations are widespread and frequent:

- Approximately 90% of all married male soldiers who were residing with their spouse were away from home at least one night during a six month period, and more than half (58%) were gone for two weeks or more.
- More than a third (37%) of married soldiers reported an "extended" separation (one month or longer) in the previous 12-month period.
- Roughly 8% of married male soldiers are not living with their families either because they are on unaccompanied assignments or because they are voluntarily separated.

In each of these separation categories, enlisted personnel experience the highest rates of family separation and are the most likely to report separation-related problems. Because the wealth of evidence suggests that *how* separations are experienced by the family may affect how well they adapt to the demands of Army life, the Army stands to realize significant long-term retention and readiness dividends by investing in programs and policies that foster successful separation experiences.

**Targeting Separation Services.** Data presented in this report indicate that in all probability, the first extended period away from home will occur sooner rather than later in a soldier's career, and to the extent soldiers marry early in their careers, young families will therefore be experiencing separations. Those

potentially in most need of support or services during separations, therefore, include:

- Spouses and families of junior enlisted soldiers (Private to Corporal)
- Junior enlisted personnel (or others) where financial problems are likely to be experienced or known to exist
- Families who are experiencing their *first* Army-related separation, especially when the wives are very young and/or have very young children.
- Families who recently have PCS'd to a new location and joined a new unit, especially when the other factors identified above are present, or when there are signs that the new family is not well-integrated into the new unit.

Providing Effective Separation Assistance. Although the majority of married soldiers and their spouses thought it very useful for the Army to provide separation services and programs, few reported having used them. Unit-based support services appear to offer the most access and impact both before and during separations. Among the most valuable functions the unit can serve is to provide information and guidance in a variety of areas, including, for example:

- Ensuring that the spouse and family understand the purpose and importance of the job the soldier is performing while he is away from home
- Preparing the families for the soldiers' possible death or injury, if appropriate, given the nature of the deployment (Orthner & Bowen, 1990)
- Accessing the types of assistance and services available to the families (e.g., medical, financial, legal, personal, etc.)
- Obtaining a will and power of attorney, and encouraging the soldier to make other financial arrangements to ensure the family's solvency during the separation
- Dealing with children in the soldier's absence, and where to go to get help if problems with the children require assistance

- Alerting families about and discussing the changes that often occur in family roles and relationships, how to prepare for them and deal with them when the soldier returns
- Reminding families that they are not alone, especially for first-time separations ("misery loves company," and it helps to know that others have survived, and even grown personally, during separations).

## FAMILY SEPARATIONS

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## **FAMILY SEPARATIONS IN THE ARMY**

### **Introduction**

Today's Army is largely a married force. Overall, 58 percent of all soldiers are married (either to a civilian or to another member of one of the military services) and families are an integral part of the military system (Griffith, Rakoff, & Helms, in preparation). Since virtually every soldier, married or single, can expect to spend some amount of time away from home during his or her Army career, separations are a fact of life for the military family.

Recent military events (Operations "Just Cause" in Panama in 1989 and Desert Shield/Storm in 1990-91) have made deployment and family separation issues more immediate to all of the services. For the better part of two decades, since the end of the Viet Nam conflict in the early 1970's, the United States has largely been "at peace" (with the exception of a brief foray into Grenada in late 1983). With the reality and inevitability of separations, however, and their likely increase given the probability of more troops based in the continental United States (CONUS) in the future, it is in both the Army's and the families' best interests to manage the separation process and experience effectively (Orthner & Bowen, 1990).

According to Lewis (1984b), one of the features that distinguishes the military family from other kinds of families is the frequent and irregular absences of the soldier from home due to deployments. The stress and family disruption associated with family separations represent a major hurdle in adjustment to military life and challenge the family's adaptive capacity (Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985; Fentress 1987). Jacobs and Hicks (1987) point out that responses to periodic separations are quite varied and that they are not necessarily a negative event. For many families, however, frequent moves and extended separations are disruptive and stressful. Etheridge (1989) cites research in which male Army officers reported that their wives viewed family separation, housing and frequency of moves as the major sources of their dissatisfaction with the military. Teitlebaum (1988) classifies "deployment separation stress and reunion readjustment" as one of four major disruptive forms of military stress for families.

Military family separations require that the entire family adjust to the changes imposed by the absence of a parent, or in the case of dual military families, both parents (Hunter & Hickman, 1981). Family and household routines are disrupted, often with little notice or time for preparation. Relationships are forced to change when the soldier leaves, and are expected to return to "normal" when the soldier returns. The reunion of the soldier and the family is often stressful. Additionally, not only is the family relationship itself affected by the separation, the family's relationship to the Army is changed when the soldier is removed from the intermediary position between the Army and family (Lewis, 1984a).

In this review of the separation literature we summarize some of the considerable output on the topic of family separations published since Hill's "seminal" work on soldiers returning from World War II (Hill, 1945). Because the Army traditionally has been composed primarily of male soldiers with civilian wives, most of the research has focused on how wives cope with the husband's absence, factors that affect their ability to cope, and on the readjustment problems that may occur after the separation.

### Types and Frequency of Separations

There are several military situations which result in the soldier being separated from the family. Among the reasons for family separations are temporary duty assignments, training, field duty and exercises, and combat missions. Each type has associated levels of stress, from the inconvenient disruption of household routines due to short-term TDY or field duty to the full horror of war. Mission accomplishment also requires that service personnel tend isolated duty stations around the world. Family separations occur when married personnel rotate through these routine unaccompanied tours (usually overseas) or, even if the assignment is not unaccompanied, when family housing is not available (Hunter & Hickman, 1981).

Separations in the Army totaling one month or more affect two out of three members in any 12 month period. For enlisted personnel, the average length of

separation is 5.3 months, slightly less than for Navy personnel (6.1 months) and longer than for Air Force personnel (4.1 months) (Vernez & Zellman, 1987). The frequency of separation depends in part on job category. Combat arms units deploy frequently and soldiers in these units may spend as many as 150-175 days per year away from home due to training exercises (Martin & Ickovics, 1986). The soldier in the combat arms unit may spend half of his first tour away from home (Lewis, 1986).

According to Lewis (1984b), the spouse's perception of the soldier's role in the Army contributes significantly to the acceptance of frequent absences from home. Family attitudes toward the separations are influenced by their perceptions of the necessity of the separations. Negative family attitudes about separations are reflected in their attitudes toward the Army, which ultimately may reduce soldier retention in the Army (Vernez & Zellman, 1987; Griffith, Stewart, & Cato, 1988; Orthner & Bowen, 1990).

Research findings on the relationship between separations and retention, however, are equivocal. While the disruptive effects of deployments and frequent relocations often are cited in the literature (Etheridge, 1989; Hunter, 1982), some researchers report that length and frequency of separations are less an issue than how well the spouse handles the separation. In studying retention decisions among Navy personnel, for example, Szoc (1982) found that the spouse's opinion with respect to staying in the Navy was the single most important factor in the sailor's decision to stay or leave, and that the spouse's opinion was influenced by more use of Navy services, greater years of service, and *satisfaction with separations due to deployments* (emphasis added). He notes that the last variable is "perceptual and not behavioral" and suggests from this finding and other data "that how the separations are viewed may be as important -- if not more important -- than actual time away. Indeed among those who left the service, separations were viewed as far more problematic than among those who stayed, but the actual amount of separation was slightly higher among the stayers." Similar results were reported by Lewis (1985) for a sample of Air Force officers and enlisted members and spouses, where neither frequency nor length of TDY was significantly related to career intent.

Nonetheless, separation-induced stresses are real and affect both the soldier and the family. Separations can cause the soldier to feel guilt and shame about leaving the family. They can disrupt the primary relationship and can provide opportunities for extra-marital affairs (Hunter & Hickman, 1981). The soldier may feel the loss of the spouse's companionship, loss of the children's affection, loss of normal role requirements and grief feelings associated with these various types of losses (Fentress, 1987). Some soldiers may fear their loss of importance within the family when other family members assume the absent soldier's role (Bortfeld, 1982).

For spouses, much of the research prior to 1960 focused on how waiting wives contributed to the health and well-being of their military spouses. In the 1960's, research began to describe the personal problems of wives, describing them as being under considerable stress (McCubbin, 1980). In the 1970's, indications were that military separations can actually foster a sense of independence and autonomy within military spouses (Hunter, Gelb, & Hickman, 1981). Responses to separations vary and many factors are associated with how a family will respond, among them previous life experiences, intensity of the military and other life stresses, availability of social supports, socioeconomic status, family attitudes about stressful experiences, family and individual characteristics, and coping capacities (Jensen, Lewis, & Xenakis, 1986).

### Effects of Separations on Spouses

Among the difficulties and hardships spouses experience due to separations are those associated with assuming sole responsibility for maintaining the household, caring for children, and solving family problems (Hunter & Hickman, 1981; Schwartz, Moghadam, & Rosen, 1987). There can be problems in accessing military services because of "red tape" (Hunter & Hickman, 1981). Lewis (1984a), for example, identified problems with routine Army-related processes such as receiving soldiers' paychecks and Leave and Earnings Statements, renewing identification cards, arranging for health services, communicating with soldiers by mail or telephone, utilizing powers of attorney, having to move on or off base without the soldier, and filing joint tax returns. In addition to Army-related problems, routine problems like car repair and home

maintenance can be onerous. Unique circumstances, such as a sick child or the anticipated birth of a child without the father's presence also can cause anxiety for the spouse (Lewis, 1984a; Wood & Gravino, 1988). Sometimes the solo demands of maintaining a family and household are so great that the spouse may forego a career or education in order to devote more time to household responsibilities (Kohn, 1984).

The degree of stress the spouse experiences is dependent upon a number of factors, including the spouse's own personal adaptability or flexibility and the spouse's previous exposure to family separations (Hunter, 1982). Separations reportedly can cause depression, anxiety, anger, physical symptoms, and sexual difficulties, in addition to resulting in loss of social relationships and security (McCubbin, 1980; Schwartz et al., 1987; Martin & Ickovics, 1986; Bell & Quigley, 1991; Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985). They may also cause feelings of abandonment and loneliness (Wood & Gravino, 1987). Wives who were separated from their husband during the Sinai peacekeeping mission reported that loneliness and isolation were key factors which affected family morale and their own ability to function effectively (Lewis, 1984a). In addition, Fentress (1987) describes military-induced separation as similar to a grief experience for the family. Whenever adults lose someone of great value and significance for an extended period of time (three months or more) they go through a grief cycle that is similar to the loss of someone by death. Although it is a more abbreviated process and only temporary, the emotional stages are parallel. Hunter's (1982) review of the separation literature also reports that during lengthy separations, the military wife may grieve as a widow.

Despite the abundance of research findings that military separations are stressful, there is also research that suggests some positive effects of separations. As early as 1945, Hill noted that many wives grew as individuals due to their war-induced separations. Not only do separations provide the opportunity for greater independence, they can promote development of independence, self-sufficiency, and maturity (Schwartz et al., 1987; Hunter & Hickman, 1981; Jensen et al., 1986). Many women also take advantage of the opportunity to enhance themselves educationally or vocationally (Lexier, 1982). Though separations may cause conflict and anxiety because the spouse must assume the role of both



mother and father, the success of doing both well may also result in increased in self-confidence (Hunter, 1982).

### Separations and Children

Although the research described in this report does not specifically address the impact of separations on children, children play a key role in how separations are experienced. In studies of "waiting wives" of peacekeeping troops in the Sinai, Wood and Gravino (1988) describe the presence of children as both a comfort and a strain to mothers. The mothers dreaded the sole parenting responsibilities and the anticipated monotony of six months of primary contact with young children. They also regretted the time the fathers would lose with the children and the developmental milestones they would miss in young children's development (Rosenberg & Vuozzo, 1989; Schwartz et al., 1987; Wood & Gravino, 1987). Ultimately, however, for the waiting wives, the emotional and physical closeness with the children was a source of strength, and the responsibility for them can prevent loneliness and depression (Wood & Gravino, 1987; Hunter, 1982).

The effects of father absence on children are mediated by pre-existing father-family relationships, age, sex and birth-order, as well as the meaning of the absence to the family and how well the mother copes with the separation (Jensen et al., 1986). Other factors include the length of the absence, the child's ability to cope with stress and the availability of a father substitute (Fentress, 1987). The most important factor, however, is the mother's ability to cope. The mother's adjustment to separation appears to have a profound effect on the child(ren)'s emotional and social adjustment (Hunter, 1982; Jensen et al., 1986; Lewis, 1984b; McCubbin, Dahl, Lester, Benson, & Robertson, 1976). If the mother successfully adapts to the separation, the children are less likely to experience intense negative effects of the father's absence (Fentress, 1987). Research also indicates that the stability of the marriage and a positive father relationship with the children are integral parts of the mother's resources to adjust to the separation (Lexier, 1982).

## Factors that Affect Family Adjustment to Separations

As previously noted, a number of factors have been shown to affect the soldiers' and families' separation experience. Families that are most vulnerable to the negative effects of separation include those experiencing separation for the first time, young or immature families, couples with an unstable marriage, families with limited Army experience, and families who have recently relocated.

Separation Experience. The first family separation appears to have the greatest effect on family members. Early separation experiences shape the way the family copes with subsequent separations, with families that adapted well to earlier separations tending to fare better with later ones (Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985).

Youth and Immaturity. Research indicates that younger soldiers and their families tend to have more trouble adjusting to the demands of separations (Hunter & Hickman, 1981). The young wife may not possess the skills to adjust to the stress of separations and the couple's relationship may not have matured to withstand the strains of reunion (Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985; Lewis, 1984b; Martin & Ickovics, 1986). According to data from the Annual Survey of Army Families (ASAF), separation issues are more important for spouses of lower ranking soldiers than for higher ranks (Griffith et al., 1988; Rosenberg & Vuozzo, 1989). Problems arise for younger couples because they tend to have young children who are physically more demanding than older ones, have less income, and less established social supports (Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985; Lewis, 1985; Orthner & Bowen, 1990).

Stability of the Marriage. Couples with existing marital problems are more likely to have trouble adjusting to the stress of separation (Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985). Unstable marriages often are characterized by poor communication between partners which often results in lack of preparation for the separation (Hunter & Hickman, 1981). Newly married couples also are vulnerable to the strains of separation because they have not had time to develop coping strategies to weather the normal strains of marriage (Hill, 1945; Martin & Ickovics, 1986). Segal, Kammeyer, and Vuozzo (1987) discuss the "crystallization" and

"stabilization" that occur in a marriage when the couple has everyday conversations which result in a "shared social reality." As they point out, for couples who have not been married long, the process of crystallization and stabilization may not be complete and they may thus experience separations differently from couples who have been married longer.

Lack of Experience with Army Life. ASAF data indicate that young spouses of enlisted soldiers may have problems coping when the soldier is away because they are still learning how to get along in the Army environment (Griffith et al., 1988). Other data suggest that families with little or no military experience are more likely to be vulnerable to the stresses of separation because they are less likely to be aware of support services or are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward formal or informal military supports (Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985; Hunter 1982; Orthner & Bowen, 1990).

Recent Relocation. Families who have recently relocated to a new post are more likely to be negatively affected by separation (Hunter & Hickman, 1981). A separation after relocation is likely to be more difficult because the family is new to the location and often lacks the immediate availability of support from extended family or long-term friends (Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985; Martin & Ickovics, 1986).

### Coping During Separations

Families adopt a variety of coping mechanisms to endure prolonged separations, some more healthy than others. Hill (1945) found a relatively predictable "roller coaster" pattern of adjustment which involved initial disorganization followed by recovery and eventual reorganization. To delineate specific coping mechanisms wives employ in response to prolonged separations, McCubbin and colleagues (1976) studied the readjustment of 47 families of servicemen missing in action in Vietnam and identified six coping patterns: seeking resolution and expressing feelings, maintaining family integrity, establishing autonomy and maintaining family ties, reducing anxiety, establishing independence through self development, and maintaining the past and dependence on religion.

Other research has identified similar coping strategies. Wives cope with separation by investing time and attention in the family, developing inter-personal relationships and social supports, managing strain, maintaining an optimistic definition of the situation, and developing self-reliance (Hunter, 1982; Lewis, 1984a). Well-defined family roles, positive perceptions of family members, and a stable marriage also are important factors in dealing with separations (Jacobs & Hicks, 1987; Kirkland & Katz, 1988; Lexier, 1982; McCubbin & Lester, 1977).

A key element discussed in coping with separations is social support. Rosen and Moghadam (1988) examined the "stress-buffering" model of social support and assert that stress (e.g., military separations) stimulates adaptation in most people. As a partial explanation for this buffering effect, they suggest that wives with "healthy coping resources" engage the support of other wives during stressful periods. Other researchers have reported that social supports can "armor" people against the health consequences of life stress (McCubbin & Lester, 1977) and that social support has been found to be an important variable in the management of family stress (Jacobs & Hicks, 1987). Some researchers have found that the stress-buffering effect of social support may be more strongly associated with the *perceived* availability of support (Lewis, 1984b; Orthner & Bowen, 1990; Rosen & Moghadam, 1988) and Rosen and Moghadam caution that the influence of personality on perceptions of support has not been fully explored.

### Reunions After Separations

Reunions after separations can be stressful. Family members may be extremely anxious and hold unrealistic expectations for the soldier's return (Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985). The euphoria of the "honeymoon" period immediately following the reunion may mask underlying conflicts (Lexier, 1982). According to McCubbin (1980), however, the strains of reunion appear to be a natural and predictable outcome of managing the demands of separations. Furthermore, Jensen et al. (1986), in describing the reunion studies of several post World War II investigators, suggest that "separation and reunion have differential effects." A good response to the separation may predict a bad response to the reunion. For some the reverse may be true, and other families may not cope well with either.

Many couples have trouble readjusting after the reunion (Rosenberg & Vuozzo, 1989). The returning soldier often expects things to return to "normal" after his return. Most soldiers do not anticipate that their own roles will have changed (Hunter, 1982). During the soldier's absence, however, spouses have shouldered the responsibility of day-to-day functioning and may find it hard to relinquish the role of family decision-maker (Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985). The well-adjusted wife who has become self-sufficient may pose a threat to the soldier. The longer the separation, the larger the couple's differences about role allocation are likely to be and the more difficult it will be to achieve reintegration (Hunter, 1982). How the soldier perceives the spouse's accomplishments can set the tone for the reunion (Lexier, 1982). The soldier may be proud and happy that the family successfully adapted to the separation, or the soldier may feel resentful and unwanted (Harrell & Rayhawk, 1985).

On the other hand, the spouse who has adapted to the dual roles of mother and father, successfully managing the affairs of the family, may also have grown as an individual. With this growth comes increased self esteem and self confidence (McCubbin et al., 1976; Hunter, 1982). Spouses often do not want their relationship with their husband to return to one of pre-separation dependence or submission. Segal et al. (1987) report that their study of military wives shows that marital separations produce "changes in the conceptions that many wives have of themselves and their marriages. The more wives change during the separation, the more adjustment is necessitated when their husbands return and the greater the changes in their marriages."

### The Army's Role in Providing Family Support During Separations

One of the most important functions the Army can serve for separated families is that of information provider. Dissemination of information is one of the most successful methods of relieving stress and formal military agencies should maintain the flow of accurate and timely information to families (Lewis, 1984b; Bortfeld, 1982; Van Vranken, Jellen, Knudson, Marlowe, & Segal, 1984). In addition, reliable means of direct communication with the deployed soldier can help alleviate fear and isolation stress, improve the family's tolerance for the separation, and increase the family's commitment to the soldier's career

(Teitlebaum, 1988). Separation stress also is alleviated if the spouse is integrated into the military community. This includes, among other things, the spouse's awareness that use of community support services will be understood and accepted without risk to the soldier's career and the family's status in the community (McCubbin & Lester, 1977).

The Army provides separation support at two levels: formal, Army-wide service agencies, and unit-level formal and informal networks to assist waiting families with the stress of separations (Van Vranken et al., 1984). Among the former are Army Community Services, legal, medical, child care and housing services. At the unit level, support services can include pre-deployment briefings, Family Support Groups (FSGs), and Rear Detachment Commands (RDCs).

Well-integrated units and stable families can provide effective support for each other (Kirkland & Katz, 1988; Lewis, 1984a). Preliminary Operation Desert Shield/Storm experiences seem to confirm this finding. Some program managers have suggested that family morale was highest in units where commands sustained active communication with their family members (Military Family, 1990). Research on soldiers and families involved in the Sinai peacekeeping force suggests the three key elements to developing and maintaining successful support of families are command sponsorship, a coordinated relationship between support networks and Army agencies, and a dedicated core of family members to facilitate support group interaction (Lewis, 1984a).

The Sinai mission also provided important information on the value of pre-deployment programs designed to prepare families for separations. According to Jensen et al. (1986), these programs not only serve to prepare families but also can be effective in strengthening them. Prior to the Sinai deployment, for example, Chaplains at Ft. Bragg held pre-departure seminars for spouses that covered such topics as loss of companionship, assuming new and expanded family roles, feelings of grief, and the need for a supportive community (Fentress, 1987). Lexier (1982) also described a preventive program designed to minimize the impact of father absence in separations of six to eight months.

Pre-deployment briefings are also important for informing families about what military services exist and how to access them, including, for example, the value of having a will, a power of attorney and direct deposits. Many families who need services may not get them because they are unaware the services exist. Families at the greatest risk for this are newcomers or first term wives who often lack both the information and skills to obtain community services (Teitlebaum, 1988).

During separations, RDCs and FSGs have proved to be key elements in providing information and social support to separated families (Bell & Quigley, 1991; Lewis, 1984a; Teitlebaum, Woods, & Gravino, 1989). RDCs provided effective assistance, rumor control, and help in dealing with problems around pay, benefits and Army services during the Sinai mission (Lewis, 1984a; Teitlebaum et al., 1989). Bell and Quigley (1991) also report early Operation Desert Shield/Storm findings that RDCs were effective in providing information and rumor control to families during that conflict. Further, they report that FSGs were the most important factor in promoting social support among separated families.

In summary, in the 47 years since Hill's (1945) groundbreaking work on returning soldiers, a considerable volume of separation literature has been generated examining numerous aspects of military family separations. While some research findings have been consistent across studies, many have revealed mixed or inconclusive findings. Different families experience separations differently. Not all separations are stressful. Not all reunions are joyful. Some wives develop a new sense of self-confidence and independence during the separation, about which their returning husbands are proud. Other husbands find these changes threatening and stressful. Researchers do agree that a variety of factors, including both family characteristics and external support, contribute to the success (or not) of a separation experience.

The challenge is to further refine our understanding of the interaction of these factors in order to ensure early and frequent separation successes. Most of the military separation literature discussed above deals with "long and dangerous" separations, e.g., WWII, Viet Nam, the Sinai peacekeeping force, etc. Because of the time frame in which the data for this report were collected, however, none of

the separations reported was likely to have had a serious risk of combat associated with them. The nature of these separations, therefore, may not be fully consistent with those described in the literature.

### **Research Questions**

This research focused on determining the nature and extent of family separations in the Army and identifying which family characteristics are associated with various aspects of separations. Research questions in five key areas were investigated:

1. How many Army families experience what types of Army-related separations? What military and family characteristics are associated with what types of separations?
2. What is the "preparation status" of Army families before separations, and to what extent does it affect how much soldiers and spouses worry or have trouble coping during separations?
3. Who worries during separations? What family characteristics are associated with soldiers and spouses who report more separation worries and coping problems? Also, who copes well during separations?
4. What is the extent of "reentry" adjustment problems after the soldier returns? What characteristics are associated with soldiers and spouses having trouble adapting to each other after the separation?
5. What is the impact of support systems, both formal and informal, in mitigating separation stress? What is the Army's role in supporting soldiers and families during separations? Are Army separation programs and services perceived as useful? To what extent are they used? What is the impact of community and social support systems?

Answers to these questions should provide the Army a better understanding of the differential impact of separations on families, and should be helpful in targeting services to the types of families most vulnerable to experience separations and separation stresses.



## Methods

The data used in this report are from the 1989 Army Soldier and Family Surveys which were collected as part of the Army Family Research Program (AFRP) conducted under contract with the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. The survey was carried out by a contractor team led by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and included Caliber Associates, Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), and Decision Sciences Consortium, Inc. (DSC).

The AFRP survey collected data from a probability sample of units and soldiers, together with spouses of sampled soldiers. Data were also collected from other sources including: supervisor ratings of soldier performance; ratings of unit readiness by soldiers and supervisors; information on unit and installation family programs and activities; and soldier personnel file data. Soldier and unit data were collected between late February and early December, 1989, with most data collection completed by late October. Detailed information on sampling and copies of the survey instruments are located in the AFRP Report on Survey Implementation (RTI, Caliber Associates, HumRRO, 1990). This report on Family Separations only utilizes data from the Soldier and Spouse Surveys.

This section of the report describes the soldiers and spouses who participated in the survey and the sub-sample used for this report, the survey questions used for the analyses, and the data analyses conducted.

### The Samples

A total of 11,035 soldiers and 3,345 spouses completed the 1989 Army Soldier and Family Survey. Because the topic of this report is *family* separations, the sample of interest was *married* soldiers. All singles, whether never married, divorced or widowed, were excluded from this sample. Soldiers who said they were legally separated or filing for divorce also were eliminated. In addition, because of the unique issues around dual military career couples and female

soldiers with civilian husbands, and the relatively small numbers of both groups, the sample was further limited to include only male soldiers married to civilians.

The sub-sample data set for this report therefore includes 6,203 married male soldiers from Private to Colonel (referred to as the "all married soldiers" data set). Among that group of soldiers, there are 2,808 matched spouse questionnaires (45%), referred to as the "spouse" data set.<sup>1</sup> Soldiers for whom there is a matched spouse questionnaire are referred to as the "soldiers with spouses" data set.

### The Surveys

The Soldier Survey contains 164 questions, many of which have multiple parts, for a total of 449 items. It was designed to collect data for analyses of the combined effects of soldier, family, unit, and other factors on key Army outcomes such as soldier retention, readiness, and family adaptation to the demands of Army life. Data were collected on the soldier's background, work and unit environment, readiness (both individual and unit), Army attitudes and values, personal and family relationships, retention and career plans, attitudes toward Army support programs and services, and use of these programs and services. The Spouse Survey contained 97 questions, many of which mirrored soldier questions. It too covered the spouse's background, employment status, personal and family relationships, attitudes toward the Army, and service use and usefulness. Both instruments included several items devoted to the subject of family separations.

The following Soldier Survey questions focusing on separation issues were asked of soldiers whose spouse was currently living with them:

- Number of nights away from home in the past six months due to Army duty

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<sup>1</sup> Additional information about the overall AFRP sample and the Spouse Survey response rate can be found in the AFRP Report on Survey Implementation (RTI, Caliber & HumRRO, 1990).

- Whether or not the couple had experienced an extended separation (defined as one month or longer) because of military duties in the past twelve months
- Length and recency of the last extended separation
- The extent to which any of the following were experienced with the last [extended] separation:
  - spouse became more independent
  - soldier proud of spouse's handling things while he was away
  - it took time to adapt to each other after his return.

In addition, the following questions were asked of *all* soldiers (including those whose spouse was not currently living with them), whether or not they had experienced a recent extended separation:

- The extent to which the soldier worries about each of the following when he is away:
  - family's safety
  - family's ability to get car or household repairs done
  - family having enough money to meet expenses
  - child(ren)'s health and well-being
  - family's safety in the event of war
- How much of a problem his spouse would have coping if he had to go away on Army assignment for:
  - less than two weeks
  - two weeks to a month
  - several months
  - six months
- Do soldier and spouse have each of the following:
  - power of attorney in case soldier is away
  - a joint checking account
  - the equivalent of 2 weeks of the soldier's pay available in case of emergency.

Separation-related questions asked of the spouses were similar. As with soldiers, all spouses, whether or not there had been a recent extended separation, were asked how much of a problem they would have coping if their spouse went away on Army assignment for various lengths of time, and whether or not they had a power of attorney, joint checking, and emergency cash. They were also asked how often they "experienced each of the following when your spouse is away":

- Concern over ability to cope with stress
- Difficulty maintaining a positive attitude
- Worry about their own safety
- Loneliness
- Fear their spouse will be involved in combat.

In addition, there were three items specific to spouses who had experienced a recent extended separation:

- Extent to which they experienced any of the following:
  - became more independent
  - had problems with the children
  - trouble making decisions alone
  - spouse proud of the way she handled things
  - it took time to adapt to each other after his return
- Description of the separation experience relative to how they are doing "now that my spouse is home"
- Overall assessment of how well they handled the separation experience.

It is important to note that the surveys did not ask about the reason for the last separation; we do not know, therefore, *why* the soldiers who had extended separations were away from home. The survey items asked only if the had experienced any extended separations in the past 12 months and how long the soldier was gone. Because of the time frame in which the data for this research were collected, however (February to October, 1989), none of the separations reported was likely to have had a serious risk of combat associated with them.

Control variables (e.g., soldier rank) used in the analyses are described in the relevant Results sections, but included such variables as family life course and number of children, length of marriage, the spouse's employment status, whether or not the couple had experienced money problems and the like. More detailed information on the formation of variables used in the analysis is presented in the Appendix.

A number of scales were created from items on the Soldier and Spouse Surveys, two of which are central to many of the analyses conducted for this report. These scales, the Soldier Separation Anxiety Scale and Spouse Separation Anxiety Scale, are based on two of the survey questions described above. Figure 1 on the following page provides more detailed information on these scales and the items they comprise.

Several additional scales were used to conduct some of the analyses for this report, including:

- Family Adaptation Scale
- Individual Readiness Ratings
- Soldier and Spouse Separation Coping
- Soldier and Spouse Unit Leader Family Support
- Soldier and Spouse Social Support Availability
- Soldier and Spouse Community Support Network.

These scales<sup>2</sup> are described in more detail in the Results section in conjunction with the analyses in which they were used.

### Data Analysis

In general, three types of analyses were used to prepare this report: one way analysis of variance, regression analysis, and crosstabulations. All analyses were completed using SUDAAN Version 5.52, a statistical program that takes into

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<sup>2</sup> Additional information about the Family Adaptation scale can be found in Orthner, Zimmerman, Bowen, Gaddy, and Bell (1991); for Individual Readiness Ratings, in Sadacca and DiFazio (1991); and for the others, in the AFRP Analysis Plan, Volume II (RTI, Coliber, & HumERO, 1990).

**FIGURE 1**  
**MEASURES OF SEPARATION WORRIES AND ANXIETY**

<b>SOLDIER SEPARATION ANXIETY SCALE</b>
<p>Scale based on responses to:</p> <p style="margin-top: 20px;">"Here is a list of feelings or worries some soldiers have about their family (their spouse, children) when they are away on Army assignment, TDY, or deployment. How often do you worry about each of the following <u>when you are away?</u>"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Your family's safety</li><li>● Your family's ability to get car or household repairs done</li><li>● Your family having enough money to meet expenses, pay bills, etc.</li><li>● Your family's safety in the event of war</li></ul> <p style="margin-top: 20px;">Items in the scale range from 1, "very often or always," to 5, "very seldom or never." The range for the scale is from 4 to 20.</p>

<b>SPOUSE SEPARATION ANXIETY SCALE</b>
<p>Scale based to responses to:</p> <p style="margin-top: 20px;">"Here is a list of feelings or worries some spouses have when their husband/wife is away on Army assignment, TDY, or deployment. Please indicate how often you experience each of the following <u>when your spouse is away?</u>"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Concern over your ability to cope with stress</li><li>● Difficulty maintaining a positive attitude</li><li>● Worry about your own safety</li><li>● Loneliness</li><li>● Fear that your spouse will be involved in combat</li></ul> <p style="margin-top: 20px;">Items in the scale range from 1, "very seldom or never," to 5, "very often or always." The range for the scale is from 5 to 25.</p>

account the sample design in estimating variances. The AFRP sampling design was such that most other statistical programs (e.g., SAS and SPSS) would generally tend to underestimate the sample variance. Unless otherwise noted, all results presented and discussed in the Results section of the report were significant at the  $p < .01$  level or better.

Where appropriate, all analyses were conducted on all three data sets (all married soldiers, soldiers with spouses, and spouses). Since the "soldiers with spouses" sample, however, constitutes a special subset of "all married soldiers," based on whether or not the spouse returned a questionnaire, results of analyses conducted for soldier data are reported for "all married soldiers" unless otherwise noted. As with any cross-sectional data analysis, there are limitations to inferring causal relationships from the results. In many cases where statistically significant correlations between two variables are found it may be clear that *relationships* between them exist, but not *causality*.

## Results

In this section we present the results of the analyses conducted on issues relating to family separations. The results are organized into four major sections:

- The relationship between family separation and key Army outcomes, such as family adaptation to Army life, soldier retention and soldier readiness (provided as an overview to some of the linkages between family separations and these key Army outcomes).
- Separation activity, which describes the nature and extent of separations soldiers and their families experience in the Army (related to the first set of research questions).
- Family separation coping issues, with sections addressing issues "before, during, and after" the separation, as well as overall assessments of the separation experience (related to the second, third, and fourth sets of research questions).
- The role of formal and informal support systems in helping families cope with separations (related to the fifth area of research questions).

As a general reference for the results presented in this section, Table 1 describes the estimated total population of male soldiers married to civilians by rank categories. These six categories, which are used throughout the report, include the following:

- Private (E2) to Corporal (E4): PVT-CPL
- Sergeant (E5) to Staff Sergeant (E6): SGT-SSG
- Sergeant First Class (E7) to Sergeant Major (E9): SFC-SGM
- Warrant Officers: WO1-WO4
- Second Lieutenant (O1) to Captain (O3): 2LT-CPT
- Major (O4) to Colonel (O6): MAJ-COL

Note that totals may vary in subsequent tables because of missing data on a given variable; there were no missing values for rank.



**TABLE 1**  
**ESTIMATED SOLDIER/SPOUSE POPULATION BY RANK**  
**MALE SOLDIERS MARRIED TO CIVILIANS**

Total Estimated Population:	224,018
Enlisted Soldiers:	185,331 (82.7%)
Warrant Officers:	7,612 (3.4%)
Officers:	31,075 (13.9%)

ENLISTED		
% of Enlisted (N = 185,331)		% of Total (N = 224,018)
33.9%	PVT-CPL	62,917 28.1%
48.1%	SGT-SSG	89,183 39.8%
17.9%	SFC-SGM	33,231 14.8%
100.0%		82.7%

OFFICERS		
% of Officers (N = 38,687)		% of Total (N = 224,018)
19.7%	WO1-WO4	7,612 3.4%
39.8%	2LT-CPT	15,413 6.9%
40.5%	MAJ-COL	15,662 7.0%
100.0%		17.3%

## The Relationship Between Family Separation and Key Army Outcomes

Since separations are a fact of life in the Army -- a fact that potentially affects the way soldiers and families view and experience the Army -- we examined whether there were any linkages between the key separation measures used for this report and the family's adaptation to the Army, soldiers' retention intentions, and soldier readiness ratings. While the primary purpose of this report is simply to describe the extent and nature of family separations, we nonetheless provide in this section a brief discussion of how separations appear to relate to these three outcomes which are of key interest to Army policy makers and program managers. Other AFRP reports address family impacts on adaptation, retention and readiness in more detail.

### Family Adaptation

Family adaptation refers to the extent to which families adjust to the organizational demands of the Army. The Family Adaptation Scale<sup>3</sup> is a composite scale based on several items from the AFRP survey (Army-family fit, spouse support for the Army, and family adjustment to the Army) used to measure that adjustment.

The relationship between separation worries and family adaptation to the Army was explored by examining the correlation between the Family Adaptation Scale and the Separation Anxiety scales described in Figure 1 on page 19. For all three data sets the correlations were statistically significant:

- All married soldiers,  $r = .21$
- Soldiers with spouses,  $r = .24$
- Spouses,  $r = .19$ .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This scale is described in detail in Orthner et al. (1991).

<sup>4</sup> The value of "r" represents the correlation coefficient, which indicates the degree of linear relationship between two variables. Correlation coefficients can assume values between +1 and -1. A value of 0 indicates no linear relationship; a value of +1 indicates a perfect direct relationship; and a value of -1 indicates a perfect inverse relationship.

Although these results explain less than 6% of the variation in family adaptation scores, and clearly many factors other than separations are at play in determining family adaptation, it is nonetheless reasonable to conclude that soldier/family separations do play a role in families' ability to adapt to Army life.

We also examined the relationship between family adaptation and the spouses' assessment of how well they handled their latest extended separation<sup>5</sup>. The spouse questionnaire asked spouses who had experienced an extended separation in the last 12 months, "Overall, how would you say you handled this separation experience?" with the five response categories ranging from "very poorly" to "very well." A significant relationship also was found between this item and the family adaptation score ( $r = .26$ ), suggesting that families which were better adapted to Army life tended to handle separations well.

### Retention

The relationship between separation worries and retention desires or plans was less definitive. No significant correlation was found between the soldier or spouse separation anxiety scale scores and the *soldier's* stated likelihood of staying in the Army at the end of his current obligation. Moreover, the length of the last separation had no predictive value as to the soldiers' probability of staying in the Army. On the other hand, a small but significant relationship was found between spouse separation anxiety scores and the question, "At the present time, do you want your spouse to stay in the Army or leave the Army at the end of his current obligation?" ( $r = .18$ ). This relationship suggests that the greater the separation worries experienced by the spouse, the more likely she is to favor her husband *leaving* the Army at the end of his current obligation.

Neither *length* nor *recency* of the last separation appears to be linked with how supportive the spouse is of the soldier being in the Army now or making it a career. Consistent with findings reported in the literature, however, the spouse's assessment of how she *experiences* a separation may well be a better predictor of

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<sup>5</sup> Defined in the surveys as separations of one month or longer.

how she feels about her husband being in the Army (or making it a career) than either length or recency of the separation.

In general, spouses who had experienced an extended separation in the last 12 months supported the Army as a career for their husbands. Nearly three-quarters (72.5%) were very or fairly supportive, and only 10% were very or fairly *unsupportive* of their husbands' making the Army a career. But, as indicated in Figure 2, spouses who said they handled their last extended separation experience "somewhat well" or "very well" were considerably more likely to view an Army career favorably than were spouses who did less well with their last separation ( $r = .23$ ). In the same vein, spouses who handled the separation well were far less likely to be *unsupportive* of an Army career than were spouses who didn't do as well.

When controlled for soldier rank, the relationships between a spouse's successful separation experience and her support for the soldier making the army a career was significant only for junior enlisted ranks ( $p < .014$ ). Junior enlisted spouses who felt they had handled their last extended separation experience either somewhat or very well were much more likely to be very or fairly supportive of an Army career than were spouses who had done less well with their last separation.<sup>6</sup> To the extent that spouses influence the soldier's decision to stay in the Army, and the retention research suggests they do (Griffith et al., 1991), it would appear to be beneficial for the Army to help ensure that spouses, particularly those of junior soldiers, experience separations positively.

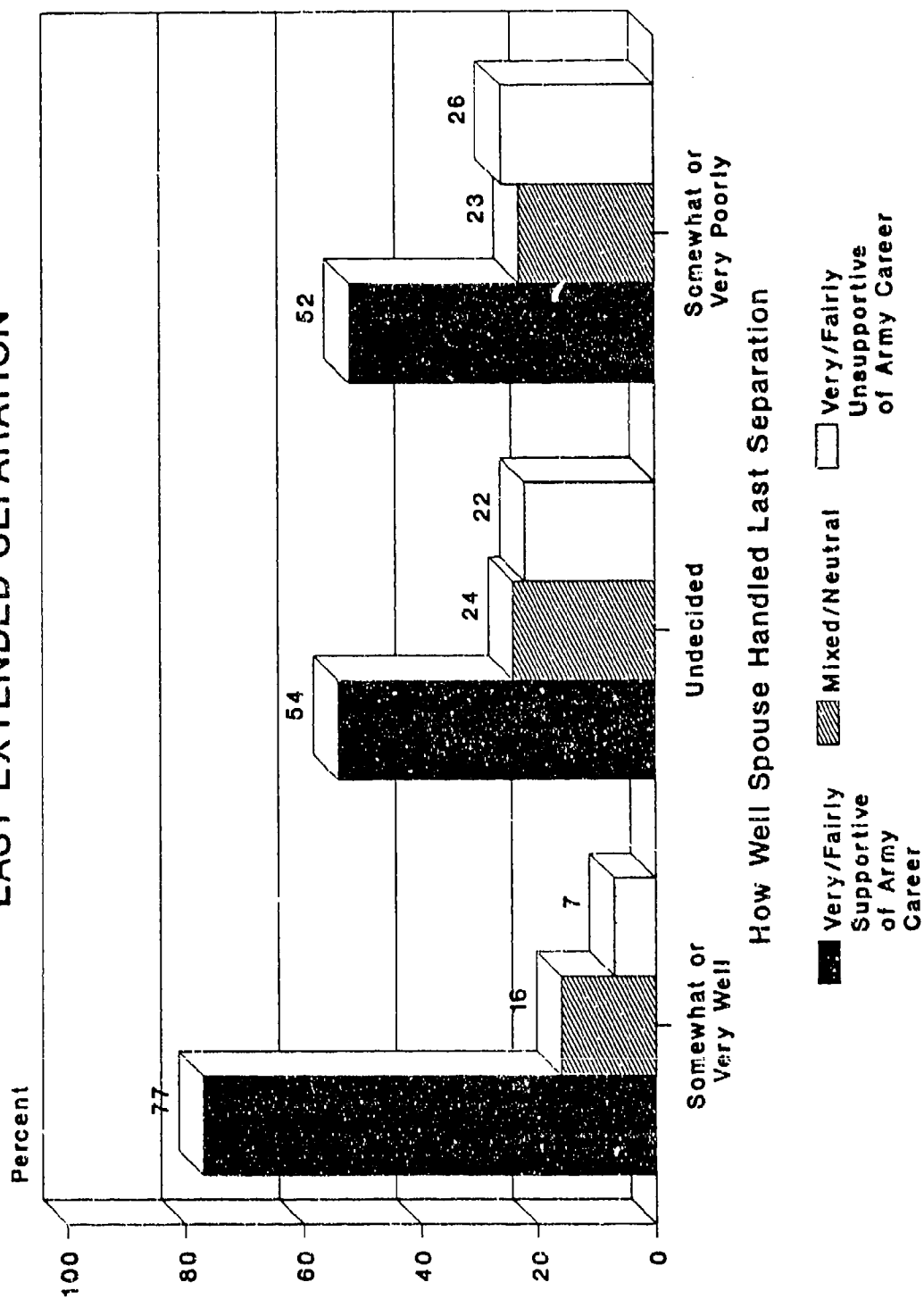
### Readiness

Intuitively it is reasonable to assume that if a deployed soldier is preoccupied with worries about his family, his performance and ability to function may suffer. Bearing this out, small but significant relationships were found

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<sup>6</sup> The relationship for wives of junior officers (2LT-CPT) was quite similar ( $p < .05$ ).

**FIGURE 2**  
**SPOUSE SUPPORT OF SOLDIER MAKING ARMY A**  
**CAREER BY HER ASSESSMENT OF HANDLING**  
**LAST EXTENDED SEPARATION**



between soldier separation anxiety scores and supervisor readiness ratings<sup>7</sup> ( $r = .17$ ). Spouse separation anxiety also was significantly correlated with soldier readiness ratings, although the correlation is too small ( $r = .13$ ) to be a meaningful predictor of readiness ratings.

In addition to the individual readiness ratings which were collected from supervisors, soldiers were asked, "If we were to go to war today, how well prepared are you to perform the tasks in your wartime job?" This self-assessment of readiness was correlated with separation anxiety scores with the same results: statistically significant but extremely low correlation. In this case, spouse separation anxiety was not related to readiness.

These analyses suggest that in all probability, separations can play a role in how the family experiences and adapts to the Army; that the family's separation experience can influence the spouse's support for her husband's retention; and that the extent to which the soldier worries about his family's well-being while away from home may, in some circumstances, affect his job performance and readiness for war.

### Separation Activity

Family separations occur in a variety of ways in the Army. They can range from short, "overnight" stays away from home, to "extended" separations where the soldier may be away for several weeks or months, to more "long term" separations where the family is separated for full length tours of duty. This section describes the nature and extent of family separations reported this sample of married soldiers.

The vast majority (92%) of soldiers and their wives live together at the same location. Soldiers who reported they do not currently live with their spouse were either on unaccompanied tours or were "voluntarily" separated for a number

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on the AFRP measures of individual readiness, see Sadacca & DiFazio (1991).

of reasons, including the spouse not wanting to leave her job, wanting to continue her education, and not wanting to disrupt the child(ren)'s schooling. Table 2, below presents data describing soldiers' separation status overall and Table 3, on the following page, by rank categories. Interestingly, the data in Table 2 indicate that there are roughly three times more *voluntarily* separated couples than couples separated because of unaccompanied tours.

**Table 2**  
**Soldier/Spouse Residential Status**

	<u>Percent of Couples</u>	<u>Estimated Population</u>
Soldier and spouse living together	91.7	201,253
Soldier and spouse not living together:		
- Soldier on unaccompanied tour	2.1	4,490
- Soldier and spouse voluntarily separated*	<u>6.2</u>	<u>13,634</u>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>219,377</b>
* Includes a small number of cases where soldier indicated "my spouse will soon join me"		

While most couples do live together at the same location, approximately 8%, or some 18,000 Army families,<sup>8</sup> do not live together. Table 3 indicates that officers are the least likely to be on unaccompanied or voluntarily separated assignments, with junior enlisted soldiers most likely to be living apart from their families.

The sections following discuss the three types of separations more fully. Unaccompanied tours and voluntarily separations (or "long term" separations) are first described. Following that, data on the nature and extent of separations experienced by couples who live together are presented, i.e., "overnight" and "extended" separations.

<sup>8</sup> These figures do not include two other categories of soldiers, dual career couples and female soldiers married to civilian husbands, both of which experience their own rates of unaccompanied tours and voluntary separations. The figure 18,000 in all probability represents a low estimate of separated Army couples/families.

**Table 3**  
**Soldier/Spouse Residential Status by Rank**

Soldier/Spouse Living Status	Soldier Rank					
	PVT-CPL	SGT-SSG	SFC-SGM	WO1-WO4	2LT-CPT	MAJ-COL
	<u>N=61,798</u>	<u>N=86,579</u>	<u>N=32,635</u>	<u>N=7,514</u>	<u>N=15,267</u>	<u>N=15,584</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Couple Living Together	87.2	92.7	92.0	94.7	97.0	97.3
Couple Not Living Together						
- Soldier on Unaccompanied Tour	2.6	2.0	3.0	0.5	0.5	0.6
- Couple Voluntarily Separated	10.2	5.4	5.0	4.7	2.5	2.1

"N" = estimated soldier population

#### Unaccompanied Tours and Voluntary Separations

"Long term" separations -- both unaccompanied assignments and tours of duty where the couple chooses, for whatever reasons, to maintain separate residence -- are experienced at a much higher rate by enlisted personnel than by officers. Across the enlisted ranks, from Corporal to Sergeant Major, 9.3% of soldiers were on unaccompanied tours or voluntarily separated; the comparable rate for officers overall (including warrants) was 3.3%.

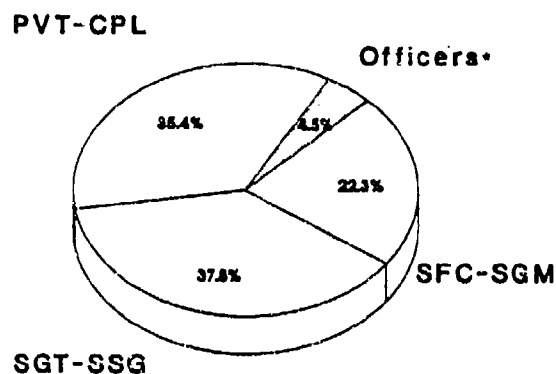
Among the married soldiers who reported being on unaccompanied tours, almost all (95.5%) were enlisted personnel (the estimated proportion of enlisted soldiers in the population overall is 87.2%). Voluntarily separated couples also were predominantly represented by enlisted personnel (92.2%), the majority of whom are *junior* enlisted (Private to Corporal). Figure 3 on the following page presents the data on both "long term" separations and non-separated personnel by rank.

The distribution of separated and non-separated personnel across *types* of units (i.e., combat, combat support, combat service support and TDA) was not

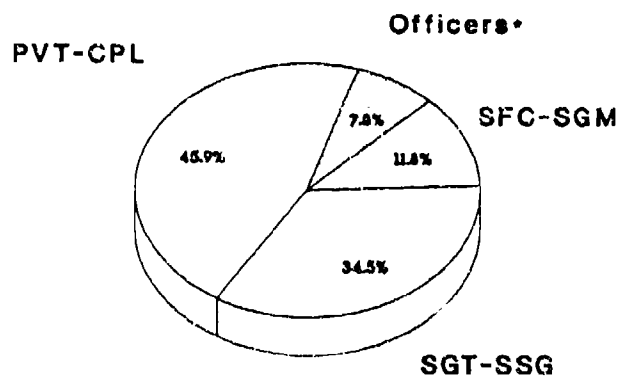


**FIGURE 3**  
**"LONG-TERM" SEPARATED AND NON-SEPARATED**  
**SOLDIERS BY RANK**

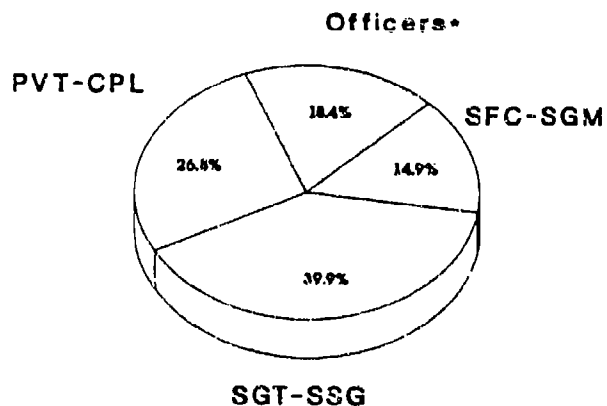
**Married Soldiers  
on Unaccompanied  
Assignments  
(Estimated Population: 4,991)**



**Married Soldiers  
"Voluntarily" Separated  
from their Wives  
(Estimated Population: 13,634)**



**Married Soldiers  
Living with Spouse  
(Estimated Population: 201,253)**



\* Includes Warrant Officers

significantly different. It was, however, for the *location* of the unit. The majority (57.4%) of unaccompanied soldiers are located in Europe, with very few (3.7%) in CONUS, and the rest (39.4%) in other OCONUS locations. Voluntarily separated couples are just the opposite: the majority (67.3%) are in CONUS assignments, followed by those in Europe (28.3%), with very few (4.3%) in other OCONUS locations. (Among couples living together, 66% are in CONUS locations, 29% in Europe, and 5% in other OCONUS assignments.)

In addition to mission-related variables (i.e., type and location of unit), we examined the relationships between separated and non-separated families and several family characteristics, including the number of years the couple had been married, number and ages of children, and whether or not the spouse was employed. All four of these two-way tests showed significant differences in family characteristics between separated and non-separated personnel. The results are presented in Table 4 on the following page.

Overall, the two groups of *separated* soldiers were quite similar. About a quarter of them had been married a year or less, and a large majority had no children. Unaccompanied personnel had somewhat more and older children than did the voluntarily separated families. Roughly half of the spouses in both groups were employed full time.

Couples living together, on the other hand, had been married longer (only 14% were married a year or less). They were far more likely to have children (only a quarter of them had *no* children), and the children tended to be younger (for roughly two-thirds of the couples, the youngest was under 5). Among spouses in this group, only about a third were employed full time, while nearly half were *not* employed.

### "Overnight" Separations

Couples and families need not be *completely* separated by unaccompanied tours to experience separations in the Army. Meetings, conferences, training, field exercises, and other deployments also result in the family being separated from

**TABLE 4**  
**FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS OF LONG-TERM-SEPARATED**  
**AND NON-SEPARATED SOLDIERS**

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS											
	# of Children	Age of Youngest Child		# Years Married			Spouse Employment Status				
		0	1	2+	≤5	5+	≤1	2-3	4+	FT	PT
COUPLE STATUS	24	28	48	65	35	14	20	66	35	17	49
Couple Living Together	63	12	26	41	59	26	15	59	50	14	36
Soldier Unaccompanied	75	12	14	57	43	25	23	53	47	14	39
Couple Voluntarily Separated											

**Note:** All figures are percents and sum across to 100 within the respective family characteristic cells

the soldier. The AFRP survey asked soldiers whose spouse currently was living with them how many nights over the last six months they were "away from home on overnight Army duty." Approximately 90% of the soldiers reported having been away at least one night, and more than half (58%) were away in excess of 15 nights during the six-month period. Responses ranged from 1 night to the entire six-month period, with a median of 30 nights. Figure 4, on the following page, summarizes "overnight" separation activity by rank. Table 5 below provides more detail on the extent of "overnight" separations.

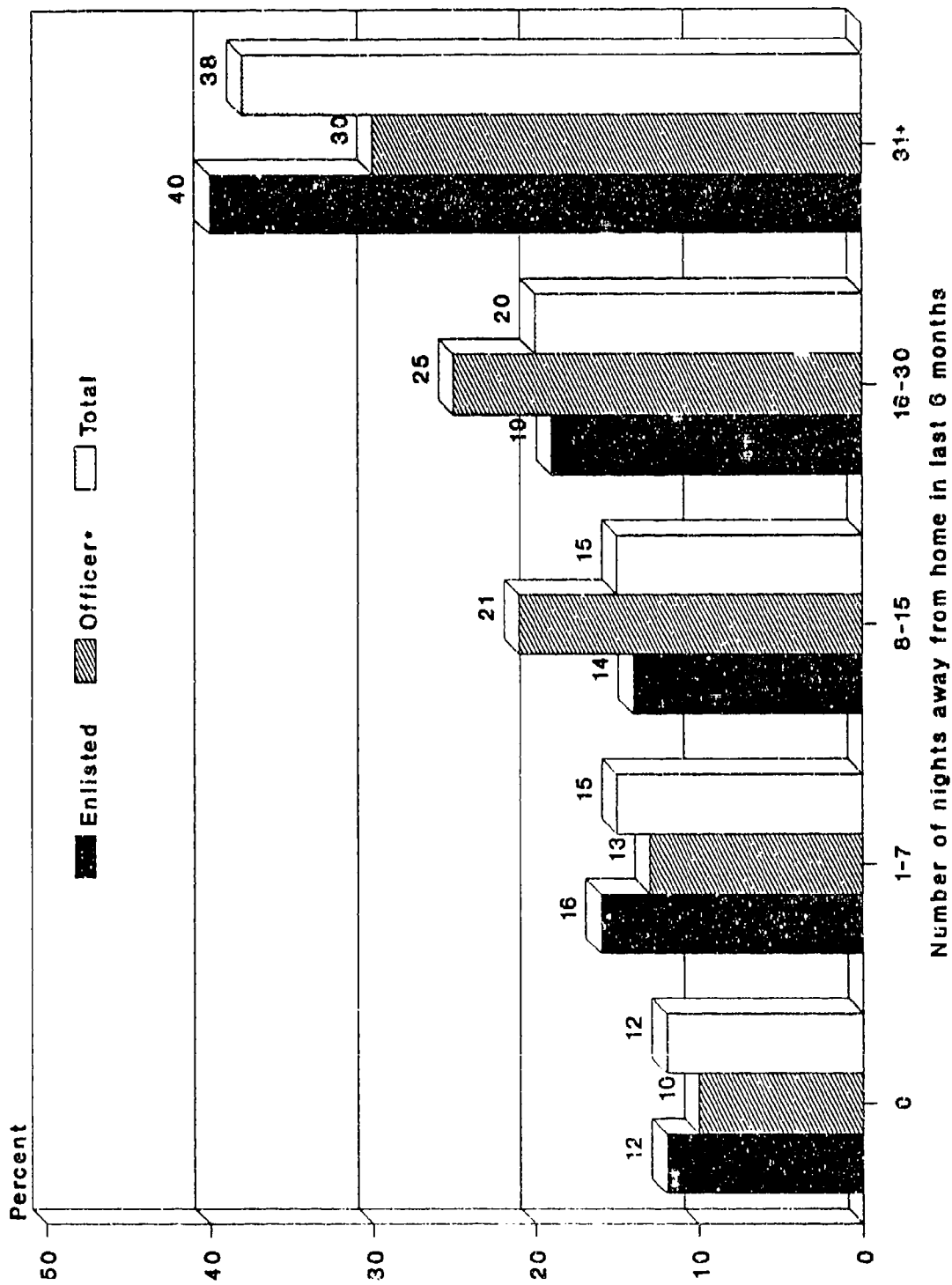
**Table 5**  
**"Overnight" Separation Activity**  
**During Past 6 Months By Rank**

	Soldier Rank					
	<u>PVT-CPL</u>	<u>SGT-SSG</u>	<u>SFC-SGM</u>	<u>WO1-WO4</u>	<u>2LT-CPT</u>	<u>MAJ-COL</u>
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<u># Nights Away</u>						
0	8.2	10.6	21.0	6.8	8.6	13.6
1 - 7	13.4	16.1	18.8	6.6	11.6	17.6
8 - 15	12.5	14.0	14.3	27.3	16.4	23.4
16 - 30	22.0	18.0	16.0	30.3	22.9	24.7
31 +	43.9	40.3	30.0	29.0	40.6	20.7

While few soldiers had the luxury of being home every night over the preceding six months, senior NCOs and officers were the most likely to be able to stay home. Moreover, senior officers were the least likely to be away for 31 or more nights; junior enlisted soldiers were the most likely to be gone the longest.

Significant differences in "overnight" separation activity also were found when the type of unit was examined. The most notable difference was between combat and TDA units. Slightly over half (53%) of the married soldiers assigned to TDA units had been away seven nights or less; fully a quarter spent *no* nights away from home in the last six months. For soldiers in combat units, however, the story was quite different. More than half of them (55.4%) spent 31 or more nights away from home, and nearly 80% reported being away 16 or more nights. Combat support units were similar in their overnight activity: nearly half (46%)

**FIGURE 4**  
**"OVERNIGHT" SEPARATION ACTIVITY IN PAST 6 MONTHS**



Includes Warrant Officers

were away more than 31 nights roughly 70% of soldiers in these units reported being away 16 or more nights over the past six months. Overnight separation activity by the type of unit is summarized in Figure 5.

Although there is a relationship between the type of unit and the number of nights away, no significant differences were found based on *where* the unit is located. Soldiers in CONUS, Europe, and other OCONUS locations reported roughly equal numbers of overnight separations.

Family characteristics significantly associated with the number of nights soldiers spent away from home included length of the marriage<sup>9</sup> and number and age of children. Few soldiers who had been married a year or less (8.8%) spent every night of the last six months home, and 62% of them were gone 16 or more nights. Soldiers married two or more years were about a third more likely to have stayed home, and somewhat fewer of them (57.5%) were away for 16 or more nights. Although the relationship between the number of children and the number of nights away was significant, the differences were not large. For soldiers with children, 56.7% were away 16 or more nights, and among those without children, 63% were gone 16+ nights. Among soldiers who didn't travel, there was virtually no difference between the numbers who did and did not have children.

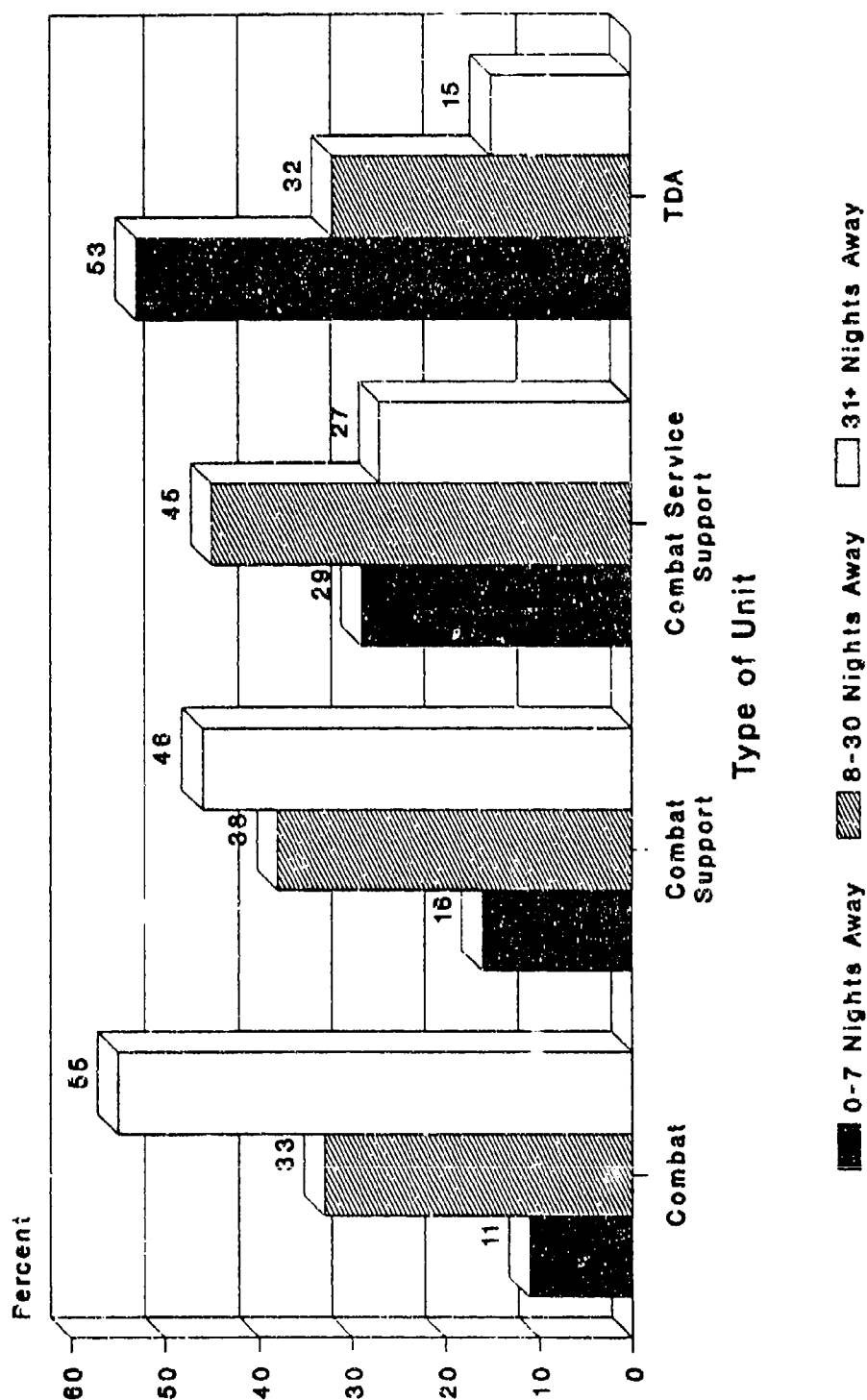
### "Extended" Separations

In addition to reporting the number of nights they had spent away in the last six months, soldiers also were asked whether they had "experienced any extended separations (of one month or longer) because of military duties in the past twelve months." Overall, more than a third (37.1%) of soldiers and spouses who live together reported an extended separation during the previous year. Enlisted

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<sup>9</sup> Length of marriage is significantly related to rank. Overall, 65% of soldiers have been married 4 years or longer; 21% for 2-3 years, and 14% for a year or less. Among those married a year or less, 89% are in the ranks Corporal to Staff Sergeant. Senior NCOs and officers (i.e., all ranks from Sergeant First Class to Colonel) account for only 11% of the newlyweds. Among soldiers of higher rank (again, all ranks from Sergeant First Class to Colonel), 86.8% have been married 4 years or more. Among the Corporal to Staff Sergeant group, 54.6% have been married 4 years or more.

FIGURE 5  
NUMBER OF NIGHTS AWAY IN PAST 6 MONTHS  
BY TYPE OF UNIT



personnel in ranks Corporal to Staff Sergeant reported the highest rates of extended separation, and field grade officers the lowest:

●	PVT to CPL:	40.0%
●	SGT to SSG:	41.2%
●	SFC to SGM:	31.2%
●	WO1 to WO4:	34.8%
●	2LT to CPT:	38.0%
●	MAJ to COL:	17.3%.

The length of the extended separations experienced by soldiers in the various rank categories is presented in Figure 6 on the following page.

Across all ranks, the majority (63.5%) of extended separations lasted from one to two months. Roughly one-fifth of the separations were five months or longer. About a third of the junior enlisted and junior officers, and nearly 40% of the junior NCOs who reported an extended separation were away for more than three months. Although senior officers were by far the least likely group to have experienced an extended separation, they were the most likely to be away for five or more months when they did have to travel. For the junior enlisted group, it is highly likely that this extended separation may have been the first Army-related absence they had experienced.

Soldiers in combat support units were most likely to report having had an extended separation in the past year and those in TDA units the least likely.<sup>10</sup> For each type of unit, the following percentages of soldiers reported an extended separation:

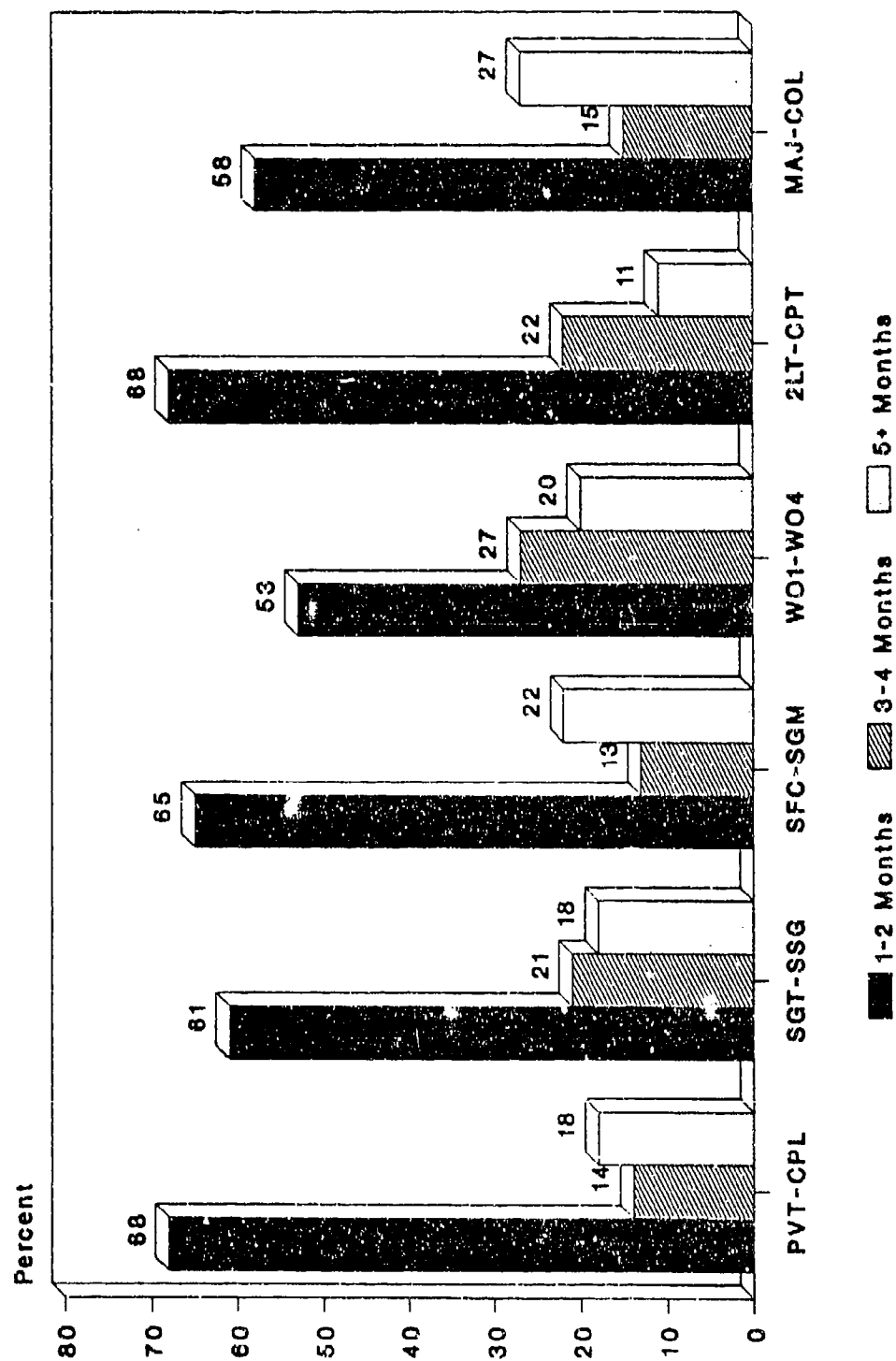
●	Combat support	43.3%
●	Combat	39.1%
●	Combat service support	32.2%
●	TDA	22.2%.

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<sup>10</sup> The distribution of married male soldiers with civilian wives across the four types of units is the following: combat, 40.3%; combat support, 15.4%; combat service support, 16.4%; and TDA, 27.9%.



**FIGURE 6**  
**LENGTH OF LAST EXTENDED SEPARATION**  
**BY RANK**



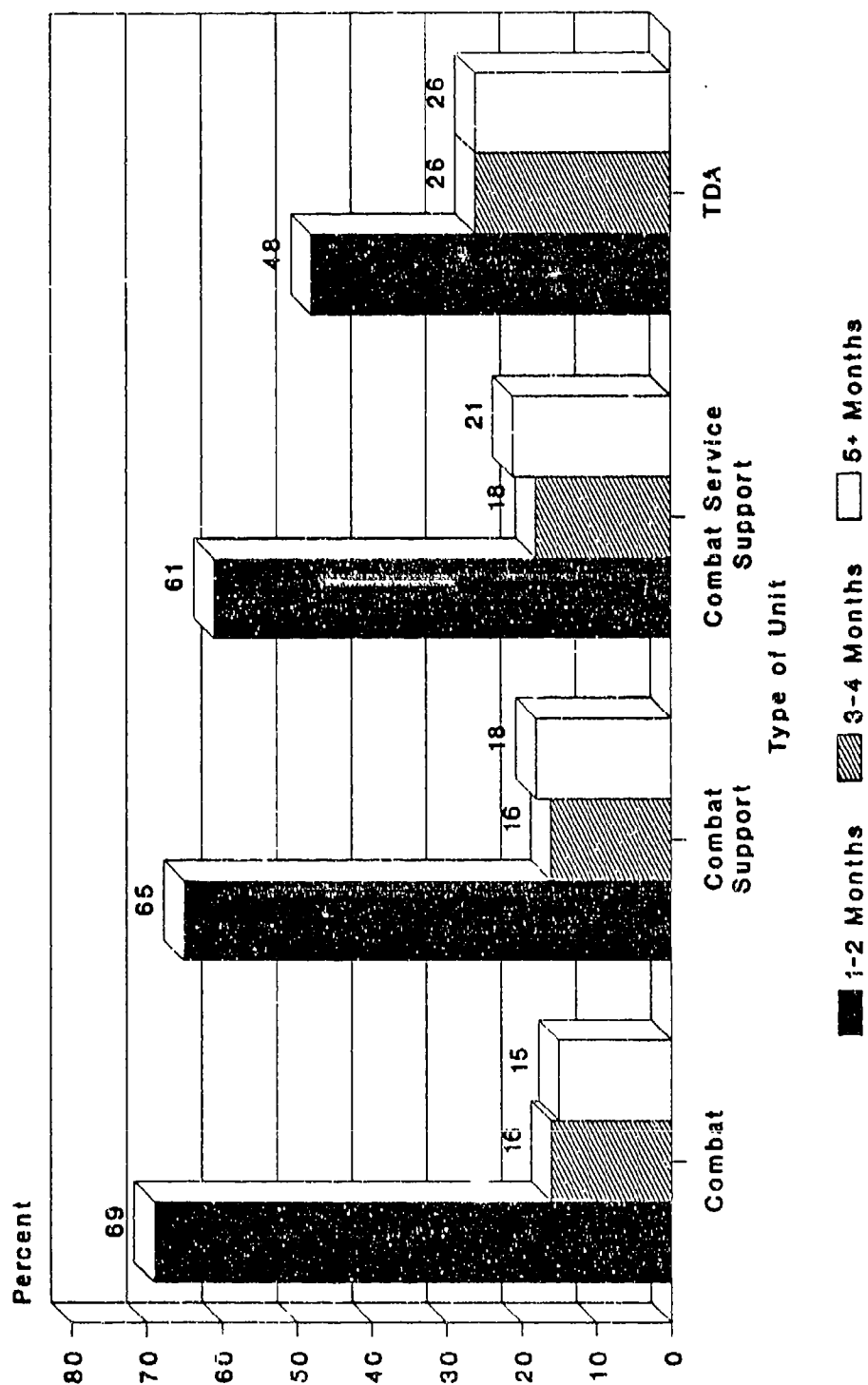
Once again, the length of the separations varied significantly by type of unit. Lengths of extended separations by type of unit are presented in Figure 7. The figure shows that overall, regardless of the type of unit, most extended separations lasted less than three months. Soldiers in TDA units were somewhat more likely than soldiers in all other types of units to experience very long separations (those of five months or longer), while soldiers in combat units were the least likely to be away for so long.

There were no significant relationships between any of the other variables examined, either military (location of the unit) or family (length of marriage, number and age of children, spouse employment status), and the length of extended separations reported.

### Summary

Family separations are wide-spread and largely indiscriminate in the Army: almost all soldiers experience a separation of some form in a given six-month period. Long-term separations (unaccompanied tours and those done voluntarily) affect only about 8% of married male soldiers, but are experienced disproportionately by young enlisted personnel. Among soldiers who were living with their wives, about 90% were away for at least one night over a six-month period, and the majority were away more than two weeks. Extended separations of a month or longer during the past year were reported by more than a third of the soldiers living with their spouses. Most of these separations were less than three months, but among the lower officer and enlisted ranks, a third or more were gone for more than three months. Because so many of those affected by all of the types of separations are junior, the affected families tend to be young as well.

FIGURE 7  
LENGTH OF LAST EXTENDED SEPARATION BY  
TYPE OF UNIT



## Family Separation Coping Issues

In this section we present findings from a series of analyses organized around the three stages of a separation. In the first part we look before the separation at three measures of preparedness from the AFRP Soldier and Spouse Surveys. The next part focuses on soldier and spouse experiences during the separation, while the subsequent section addresses soldier/spouse readjustment after the soldier returns. Finally, we analyze spouses' overall assessment of the their last extended separation experience and present soldiers' and spouses' projections about coping with future separations.

### Before the Separation

There are a number of steps that soldiers and families can take to prepare for periods of separation that may help the families cope and reduce some of the worries associated with separations. Among them are executing a power of attorney for the spouse and ensuring that she has ready access to adequate financial resources while the soldier is away. The AFRP surveys included three measures of "preparedness": whether or not the spouse has a power of attorney, a joint checking account, and the equivalent of two weeks of the soldier's pay available in case of emergency. "Preparation status" deals with the extent to which families are "prepared" to manage their separations, as measured by whether or not the spouse has a power of attorney, a joint checking account, and access to emergency cash. This section describes the extent to which "preparation status," as defined above, is related to separation anxiety.

The following questions were asked of both soldiers and spouses:

- Does your spouse [Do you] have a power of attorney in case you [your spouse] are away?
- Do you and your spouse have a joint checking account?
- Does your spouse [Do you] have the equivalent of 2 weeks of your [spouse's] pay on hand or in savings in case of emergency?

For these analyses, "Don't Know" responses were recoded as "No," the rationale being that if someone doesn't know whether they have a power of attorney, a joint checking account or emergency cash, the effect is the same as not having them.

Three types of analyses were conducted for this section. Crosstabulations were used to obtain overall frequencies for the three items and to determine if there were any differences in "preparation status" by soldier rank, length of marriage, and number of children. One-way analysis of variance was used to evaluate differences in separation anxiety scale scores to determine if there were differences between those who do and do not have any of the items. Finally, the extent to which couples agreed about having each of the three items was compared using ratio analysis. Unfortunately it was not possible to determine from the survey data whether families had these items prior to their last separation. Consequently, cause and effect between the preparation measures and separation worries cannot be definitively established.

In comparing the responses of the matched soldier/spouse samples, a high level of agreement was found on the first two items. That is, virtually all of the couples were agreed as to whether or not they had a power of attorney and a joint checking account. On the third item, however, 14% more soldiers<sup>11</sup> than spouses indicated they had the equivalent of two weeks of the soldier's pay available in case of emergency.

There were significant differences by rank on all three "preparedness" items. In Table 6, on the following page, the percentage of soldiers in each rank category who answered "Yes" to the items is presented.

Overall, more than half of all couples have a power of attorney for the spouse in case the soldier is away, but the number is less than might be expected, especially at higher ranks. Joint checking accounts are more common across all ranks: among the junior enlisted, about three-quarters of all couples reported

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<sup>11</sup> The difference was significant at  $p < .01$ .

**Table 6**  
**Percent of Soldiers Who Have Power of Attorney,  
 Joint Checking, and Emergency Cash, by Rank**

	Soldier Rank					
	<u>PVT-CPL</u>	<u>SGT-SSG</u>	<u>SFC-SGM</u>	<u>WO1-WO4</u>	<u>2LT-CPT</u>	<u>MAJ-COL</u>
<i>Do you have:</i>						
Power of Attorney	55.3	67.9	64.6	75.5	71.8	61.7
Joint Checking	74.0	82.2	90.8	98.1	95.8	96.9
Emergency Cash	46.1	54.5	74.5	80.3	77.7	89.6

having them, and almost all officer couples do. Not surprisingly, the availability of emergency cash varied widely by rank. The percent of soldiers having at least two weeks of pay in savings varied from about 90% for field grade officers to less than 50% for the junior enlisted.

There was also a significant relationship between length of marriage and the presence of these three items. Predictably, for all three of the "preparedness" categories, the percentage who said "Yes" increased with the length of time married, as Table 7 below indicates.

**Table 7**  
**Percent of Soldiers Who Said "YES" by Length of Marriage**

	Length of Marriage (years)			
	<u>≤ 1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2-3</u>	<u>4+</u>
<i>Do you have:</i>				
Power of Attorney	40.2	54.3	62.1	69.1
Joint Checking	61.9	72.9	79.9	89.0
Emergency Cash	45.2	51.3	54.8	64.5

Only power of attorney and joint checking were significantly related to the "number of dependent children now living with you." Couples who have children

are more likely to have powers of attorney than those who don't, and also are more likely to have a joint checking account, as indicated in Table 8.

**Table 8**  
**Percent of Soldiers Who Said "YES" by Number of Children**

	Number of Children		
	0	1	2+
<i>Do you have:</i>			
Power of Attorney	57.5	64.0	68.1
Joint Checking	72.7	88.5	88.4

In addition to analyzing the *extent* to which couples are prepared, as measured by whether or not they have a power of attorney for the spouse, a joint checking account and emergency cash, we also analyzed the relationship between these "preparedness" indicators and scores on the Soldier and Spouse Separation Anxiety Scales. For soldiers, having a joint checking account and emergency cash available were associated with lower anxiety while away from home. Of the two, the existence of emergency cash would seem to be the more important factor ( $R^2$  of .073 compared to .01 for joint checking).<sup>12</sup> The existence of a power of attorney, on the other hand, appears to be unrelated to how much the soldier worries while he is away. For spouses, only emergency cash was associated ( $p < .035$ ) with lower separation anxiety, albeit of limited explanatory power ( $R^2 = .005$ ). The difference in these relationships can be explained in part by the fact that the soldier Separation Anxiety Scale includes an item about money worries (see Figure 1 on page 19), whereas an item about money worries is not an explicit element of the spouse Separation Anxiety Scale.

<sup>12</sup>  $R^2$  refers to the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable which can be predicted or "explained" by the independent variable(s). The larger the "R-square," the better the prediction. An  $R^2$  of .073, for example, would "explain" 7.3% of the variance in the dependent variable, whereas an  $R^2$  of .64 would explain 64% of the variance. "R-square" is related to the correlation coefficient "r." As the name suggests,  $R^2$  is the square of "r," thus if one value is known, the other can easily be determined.

Summary. Having a power of attorney or a joint checking account or the equivalent of two weeks' pay on hand for emergencies are among any number of things couples can do to prepare for separations. By and large, with the exception of junior enlisted soldiers' emergency cash reserves, the majority of soldiers can be considered "prepared" by these three measures. These analyses suggest that a cash reserve is the most likely of the three to reduce soldier anxiety about the family while he is away.

### During the Separation

In this section we discuss the results of analyses which focused on the actual period of soldier absence -- that is, while he is away. First we examined *overall* the extent to which soldiers and spouses said they worry when the soldier is away, whether or not they have had a recent separation. All soldiers and spouses, whether or not they had experienced a recent extended separation, completed the questions on which the two separation anxiety scales were based. We then examined the sub-set of the sample, roughly 37%, who reported having had an extended separation in the last 12 months.

Separation Worries. Different types of couples and families experience separations differently. Using one-way analysis of variance, we examined whether the amount of separation anxiety for soldiers and spouses as measured by the two Separation Anxiety Scales was related to any of the following variables:

- Soldier rank
- Region (unit location in CONUS, Europe or other OCONUS)
- Age of youngest child
- Number of children
- Presence of children with problems
- Spouse employment status
- On- or off-post housing
- Length of marriage



- Money problems
- Length of time at current location.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, because the Soldier Anxiety Scale does not address worries about children, we conducted similar analyses on the individual survey item, "How often do you worry about your child(ren)'s health and well-being when you are away?"

For both soldiers and spouses there were significant differences between groups in the mean anxiety scale scores for the following variables:

- Soldier rank
- Age of youngest child
- Spouse employment status<sup>14</sup>
- Length of marriage
- Money problems
- Length of time at current location.

The strongest relationship and most meaningful differences were for the variable rank, discussed below. The other significant relationships are then summarized.

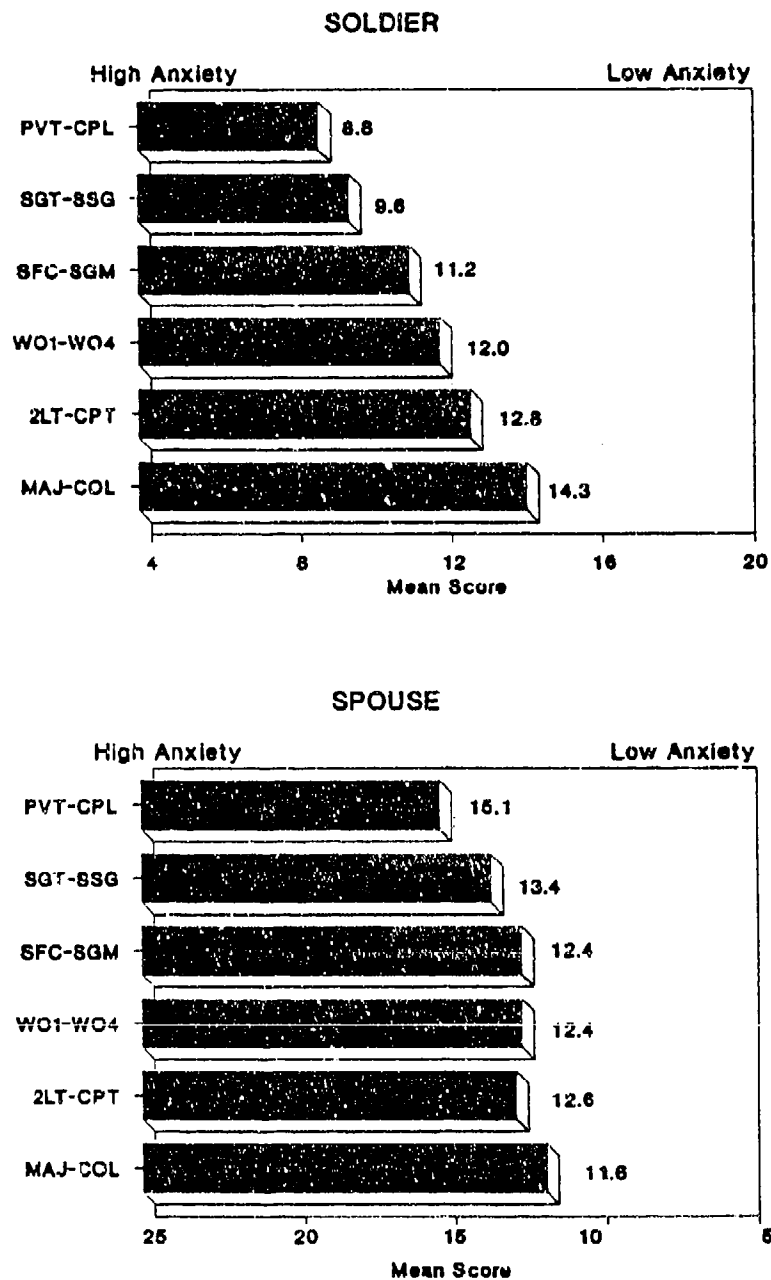
In general, soldiers and spouses in lower ranks experience more separation anxiety when the soldier is away than do those of higher rank. Mean scale scores for the six rank categories for both soldiers and spouses are presented in Figure 8 on the following page. It is important to remember that the Soldier and Spouse Separation Anxiety scales differ in three important ways: i) they are inverted; for soldiers, a higher score means lower anxiety; for spouses, a lower score means lower anxiety; ii) the soldier scale ranges from 4 to 20, the spouse scale from 5 to 25; and iii) the items on the scales are different (see Figure 1 on page 19).

Figure 8 portrays a steady decline in separation anxiety with a rise in rank. So consistent is the decline as rank rises that it does not detour for junior officers,

<sup>13</sup> Since length of time at current location is a continuous variable, the analysis used was simple regression.

<sup>14</sup>  $p < .017$  for this variable on the spouse separation anxiety scale.

**FIGURE 8**  
**SOLDIER AND SPOUSE SEPARATION ANXIETY**  
**MEAN SCALE SCORES**



• Soldier anxiety scores on a scale from 4 to 20  
 Spouse anxiety scores on a scale from 5 to 25

who, in terms of length of military service, could be considered similar to junior enlisted or junior NCOs. This suggests that while length of service may, indeed, be a factor in the extent to which an absent soldier worries about his family, other factors for which rank may be a surrogate (e.g., education, socioeconomic background) also would appear to contribute. Spouse anxiety also decreases with soldier rank, but not as dramatically as for soldiers.

In addition to determining the mean scale scores, we classified the scales into "high," "medium" and "low" separation anxiety categories which were then crosstabulated with paygrade to shed additional light on differences between the six paygrade groups. The soldier scale was divided as follows:

- "High" anxiety: 4 to 9
- "Medium" anxiety: 10 to 14
- "Low" anxiety: 14+ to 20.

For spouses (larger scale and in the opposite direction), the categories were defined as:

- "High" anxiety: 18+ to 25
- "Medium" anxiety: 11.5 to 18
- "Low" anxiety: 5 to 11.25.

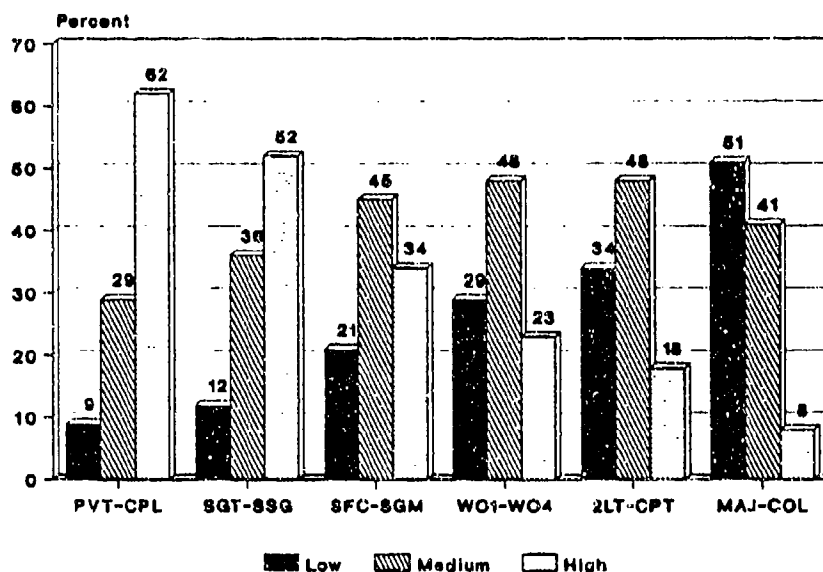
The scales were divided so that roughly a third of the range of each scale fell into each of the three categories.

The crosstabulated data for both soldier and spouse scales are presented in Figure 9. Overall, 46% of soldiers fell into the "high" anxiety category, 37% in the "medium" category, and 17% in "low." For spouses overall, 13% experience "high" anxiety during separations, 53% "medium" anxiety levels, and 34% "low."

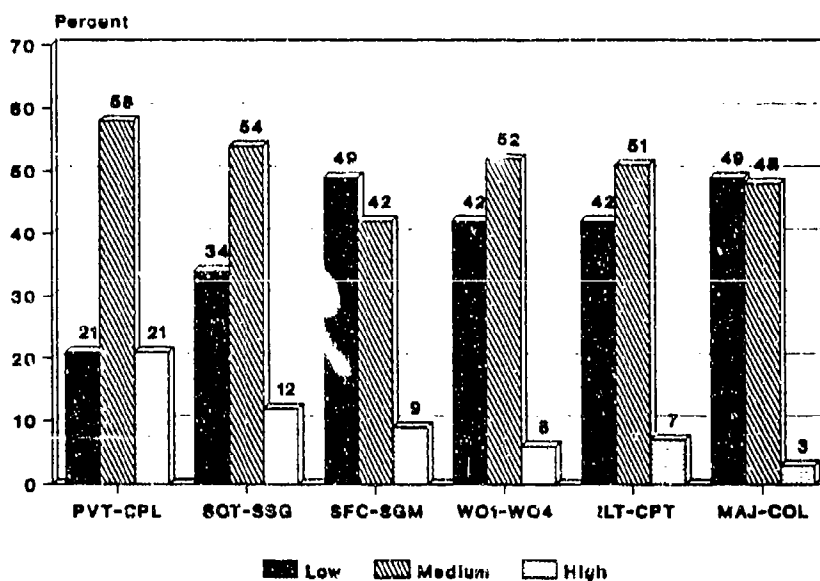
Figure 9 also shows that anxiety tends to decrease as rank increases for both soldiers and spouses. Among junior enlisted spouses, one in five experiences

# **FIGURE 9** **SOLDIER AND SPOUSE SEPARATION ANXIETY**

## **SOLDIER ANXIETY DURING SEPARATION**



## **SPOUSE ANXIETY DURING SEPARATION**



"high" anxiety during separations, whereas fewer than one in 20 wives of senior officers (3.3%) falls into the "high" category. A similar trend is evident for soldiers, in that separation worries tend to decrease for higher ranks, but a larger percentage of *soldiers* than spouses at all ranks falls into the "high" anxiety category.

For the five other variables significantly related to the two separation anxiety scales we found the following relationships:

- Age of youngest child. This variable explained slightly more of the variance in the soldier anxiety scores than in spouse scores (2.3% and 1.2% respectively). Soldiers whose youngest child is under age 5 worry more than soldiers without children, who, in turn, worry more than soldiers whose youngest child is over the age of 5. Spouses are similar to soldiers in that those whose youngest child is over 5 worry the *least*, but differ in that spouses *without* children experience a higher level of anxiety than do spouses with a child under 5 (the scale scores for these two groups are very close, however).
- Spouse employment status. The relationship between this variable and the anxiety scale scores, though significant, was not strong ( $r = .08$ ). For both soldiers and spouses, where the spouse is employed full time, less separation anxiety is experienced. There is virtually no difference in the scale scores when spouses are employed part time or not at all.
- Length of marriage. The relationship between the length of marriage and anxiety scale scores is remarkably consistent for soldiers and spouses (the R-squares are almost identical, .031 and .034 respectively). Young marrieds worry more than those who have been married longer. Couples who have been married a year or less experience higher anxiety during separations than do couples who have been married 2 to 3 years or more than 4. The scale score differences between the four length-of-marriage categories<sup>15</sup> were very small, however, for both soldiers and spouses.

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<sup>15</sup> The four categories are: married less than a year; married one year; married two to three years; married four or more years.

- Money problems. Money problems (defined as not having enough money to pay bills in at least one month in the past 12) are a much larger contributor to soldier anxiety than to spouse anxiety ( $R^2 = .088$  and  $.008$  respectively). While both relationships are statistically significant, the difference in scale scores between soldiers with and without money problems is substantially larger than for spouses (not an unexpected result because of the difference in soldier/spouse anxiety scale items).
- Length of time at current location. This variable's relationship with separation anxiety was small but nonetheless significant ( $r = .14$  for soldiers,  $r = .12$  for spouses). For both soldiers and spouses, increasing length of time at the current location reduced separation anxiety slightly (less than one-half scale point for 12 months' time).

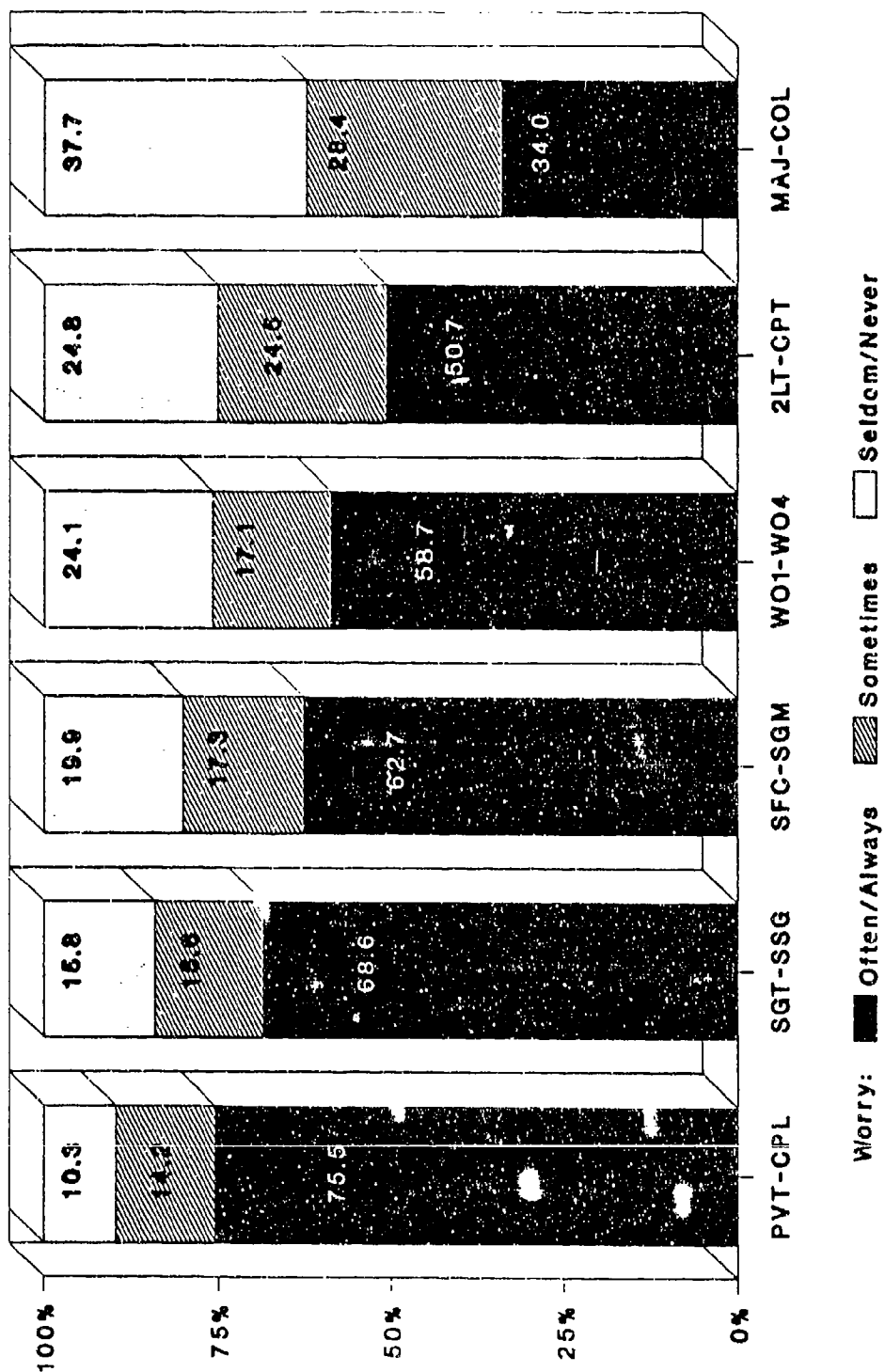
Soldier Worries About Children. For soldiers with children, the extent to which they worry about their children when they are away varied by rank, age of youngest child, length of marriage, money problems, and length of time at current location.

The strongest relationship, once again, was for rank ( $R^2 = .067$ ). Responses for this item ranged from 1, "very seldom or never" to 5, "very often or always." Mean scores across rank categories were as follows:

●	PVT-CPL	4.15
●	SGT-SSG	3.94
●	SFC-SGM	3.69
●	WO1-WO4	3.52
●	2LT-CPT	3.41
●	MAJ-COL	2.96.

The same relative outcome can be seen for this item as for the soldier anxiety scales: junior enlisted soldiers worry more about their children than do more senior personnel. Figure 10 presents the results of the significant crosstabulation between this item and rank. It illustrates the steady decline in the extent to which soldiers worry about their children while they are away as rank increases. Senior officers are nearly four times more likely *not* to worry about the children than are

**FIGURE 10**  
**EXTENT TO WHICH SOLDIERS WORRY ABOUT**  
**THEIR CHILDREN WHILE AWAY, BY RANK**



junior enlisted soldiers, while on the other hand, soldiers in the junior enlisted ranks are more than twice as likely than senior officers to worry "very often" or "always." These difference could result from any number of factors, including junior soldiers' probable lack of experience with separations and the fact that the children of junior enlisted soldiers, on the whole, are very young.

The other relationships, though significant, were less strong and the differences between groups fairly small. The age of youngest child had the largest R-square (.029) with soldiers whose youngest child is less than 5 worrying more than those whose youngest is more than five (scale scores of 3.97 and 3.52 respectively). The differences between the four length-of-marriage categories were much smaller (the largest difference was only .37 scale points). Soldiers married from one to three years worried about their children more often than did those married less than one year or more than four years. Soldiers who experienced problems paying their bills worried more about their children (scale score 4.09) than those who did not (3.67). Length of time at current location, though significant, had a minimal effect on reducing the extent to which separated soldiers worry about their children.

Recent Extended Separations. Since the questions on which the anxiety scales are based were asked of all soldiers and spouses, whether or not they had experienced a recent extended separation, the previous section provided a discussion of the results of analyses conducted on all sample responses. More than a third (37%) of the couples living together, however, reported having had an extended separation in the last 12 months. To test whether this group, who *had* experienced a recent separation, was any different from soldiers and spouses overall (whose separation anxiety scale scores were discussed above), we used analysis of variance to compare scale scores between the two groups formed by the soldier survey question, "Have you and your spouse experienced any extended separations (of one month or longer) because of military duties in the past 12 months?" The results showed that soldiers answering "Yes" had a mean separation anxiety scale score 0.685 points lower than those answering "No," suggesting that those having experienced a recent extended separation were more



anxious.<sup>16</sup> Though the result was statistically significant, the effect was quite small, as evidenced by the explained variance of 0.7 percent. (The same effect, greater anxiety, was found for spouses, but the result did not achieve statistical significance.)

We explored this effect by controlling for rank. The effect decreased to less than half the size (0.291) and ceased to be statistically significant. Differences between groups on the soldier question, "How often do you worry about your child(ren)'s health and well being while you are away?" also were not significant.

Since the questions on which the anxiety scales are based were asked of all married respondents (not just those with recent separations), it is possible that the small differences found between the two groups were the result of fresher memory about separation worries. It may be that during the course of the separation soldiers and spouses actually worry somewhat more than they recall when looking back on the experience.

Overall, for both soldiers and spouses, rank is the best predictor of who will experience separation worries while the soldier is away. Young marrieds, families with very young children, and families experiencing financial difficulties are at somewhat higher risk to be stressed or worry during separations, but by and large, families with these characteristics tend to be associated with lower ranks.

Spouses' Separation Problems. In this section we present findings on the spouses' assessment of how things went for them during the last extended separation (the soldiers' perceptions of how their spouses did while they were away follows in the next section).

We examined two questions posed to spouses who had experienced an extended separation in the past 12 months. The first, "To what extent did you experience the following with your last separation?" had four sub-questions relevant to this analysis:

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<sup>16</sup> Recall that on the soldier anxiety scale, low scores mean *higher* anxiety.

- I became more independent
- I had problems with the children
- I had trouble making decisions alone
- My spouse is proud of the way I handled things when he was away.

Responses ranged from 1, "very great extent" to 5, "not at all."

Table 9 summarizes spouses' responses overall to the four items above. On the first, "I became more independent," their responses were fairly equally distributed across all five response categories, with about half of all spouses selecting to a "great" or "moderate extent." On the second and third items, "I had problems with the children" and "I had trouble making decisions alone," the majority of spouses answered "slight extent" or "not at all." Finally, for the item, "My spouse is proud of the way I handled things when he/she was away," the majority of spouses answered "very great" or "great extent."

**Table 9**  
**Distribution Of Spouse Responses**  
**To Four Aspects Of Separation**

	<b>QUESTION</b>			
	<b><u>Became More Independent</u></b>	<b><u>Trouble with Children</u></b>	<b><u>Trouble with Decisions</u></b>	<b><u>Soldier Proud Upon Return</u></b>
<b><u>Response</u></b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Very great extent	14.3	7.0	1.9	38.8
Great extent	25.6	11.4	3.2	32.1
Moderate extent	24.9	22.5	9.9	15.5
Slight extent	18.1	24.2	18.6	9.3
Not at all	17.1	35.0	66.4	4.2

These responses suggest that as a group, spouses felt they became somewhat more independent as a result of the separation, and overall, had relatively few problems making decisions alone. While the majority of wives indicated they had only slight or no trouble with their children, roughly 40%

reported having at least a moderate level of trouble with them while the soldier was gone. The vast majority of wives believed that their husbands viewed their handling of the separation favorably.

To further explore spouses' assessments of these aspects of their last separation, we used analysis of variance to examine the relationships of these four questions to the following 11 independent variables:

- Soldier rank
- Region (unit location in CONUS, Europe or other OCONUS)
- Age of youngest child
- Number of children
- Presence of children with problems
- Spouse employment status
- On- or off-post housing
- Length of marriage
- Money problems
- Length of last extended separation
- Length of time at current location.<sup>17</sup>

For these analyses, the response categories were treated as a five-point scale (1 = "very great extent" to 5 = "not at all").

Among the 44 tests conducted, the only significant relationship was between the item concerning problems with children and the independent variable "presence of children with problems."<sup>18</sup> This variable is derived from the Soldier Survey question which asked: "...Think of all your children and answer YES if the

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<sup>17</sup> Since length of time at current location is a continuous variable, the analysis used was simple regression.

<sup>18</sup> Two other tests, while close, did not quite achieve the  $p < .01$  significance threshold. Both were for relationships with the item, "I had trouble making decisions alone." For the variable spouse employment status, spouses who were not working experienced slightly more problems than did spouses who were employed either full- or part-time ( $p < .022$ ). For the variable "money problems," the mean score for those without problems was slightly lower than those with problems ( $p < .013$ ). This suggests that where financial problems exist, spouses may have more difficulty making decisions alone.

statement is true for any of your children. I have a child living with me who has..."

- a) a serious behavior problem (hyperactive, chronic fighting, trouble with the law, etc.)
- b) a serious problem with school (learning disability, disciplinary problem, etc.)
- c) a serious medical problem (asthma, diabetes, etc.).<sup>19</sup>

Spouses whose husbands had indicated the presence of a child with problems had a mean score 0.5 points lower than spouses where no such child was reported. This difference suggests that where "problem" children are present in the family, spouses may experience more child-related problems while the soldier is away.

The second question we examined asked spouses to compare how they did *during* the separation relative to how they were doing after the soldier's return. The question asked, "Which of the following 3 statements best describes your experience with this separation (MARK ONE)":

- I did better during this separation than I am doing now that my spouse is home.
- I did as well during this separation as I am doing now that my spouse is home.
- I did worse during this separation than I am doing now that my spouse is home.

Very few spouses (5.3%) indicated that they did better during the separation than after their spouse came home. Almost two-thirds (64.6%) felt they did about the same during and after the separation. The remaining 30.2% reported they did worse during the separation than after the soldier's return (in other words, things

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<sup>19</sup> An explanation of our recode of this item (and others) can be found in the Appendix to this report.

were better when he got back). This distribution of responses suggests that for a good 70% of spouses, the last separation was not viewed as a major problem.

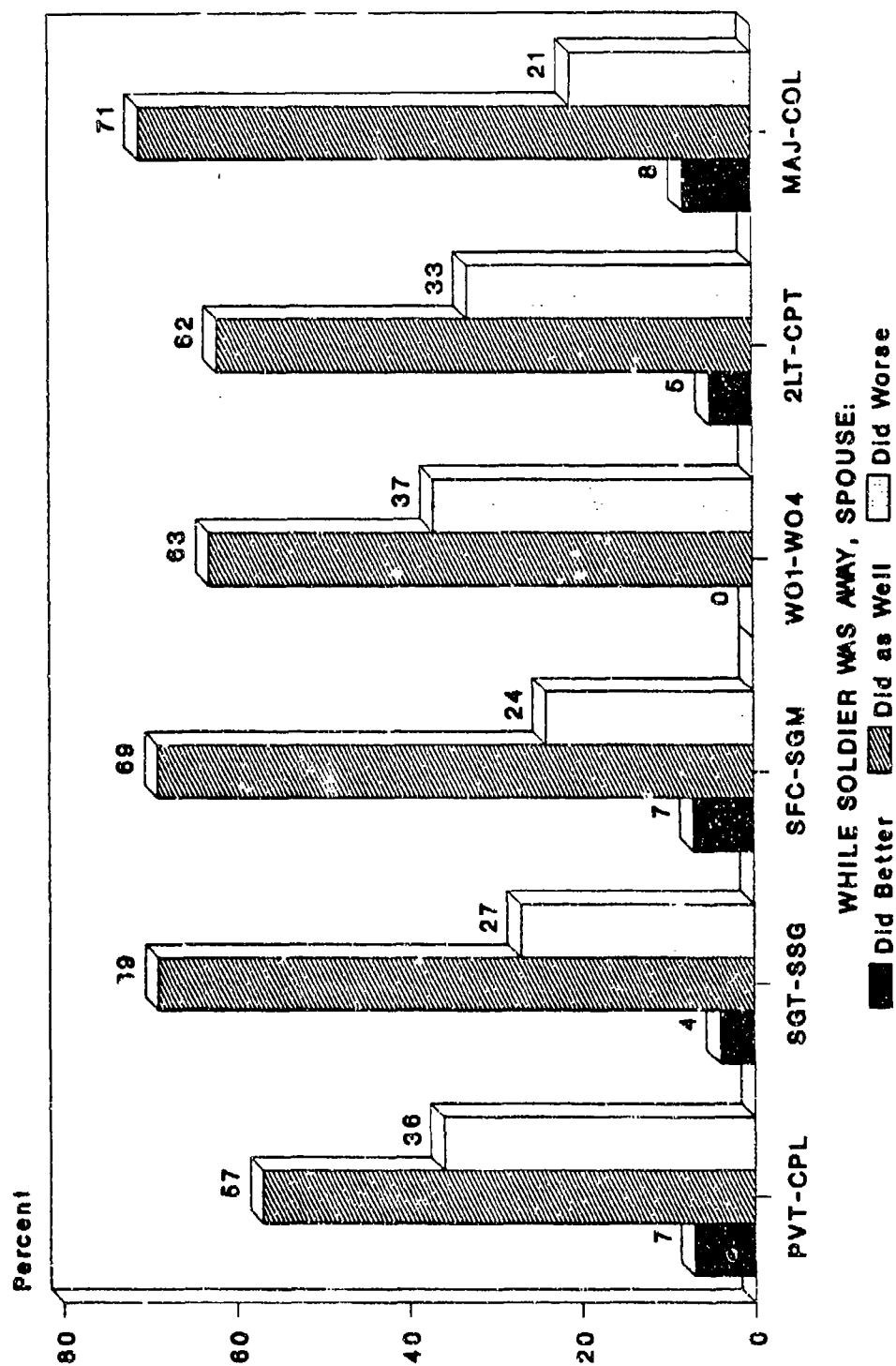
Crosstabulations were used to examine the relationship between this "outcome" variable and six factors hypothesized to affect it:

- Soldier rank
- Extent to which spouse became more independent
- Extent to which spouse had problems with the children
- Extent to which spouse had trouble making decisions alone
- Extent to which spouse believed soldier was proud of the way she handled things when he was away
- Extent to which it took time to adapt to each other again after the soldier's return.

Of the six relationships tested, all but the test with the variable, "My spouse is proud of the way I handled things when he was away," were statistically significant.

The differences between rank groups for each relative assessment level (better, same, worse) are presented in Figure 11. Although the total number of wives who said they did "better" during the separation is quite small, it is nonetheless interesting that junior enlisted wives were more likely than three of the other groups (junior NCOs, warrants, and junior officers) to have done "better," and they were virtually the same as senior NCOs' wives in the "did better" category. Overall, however, senior officers' wives were the most likely to have managed well during the last separation: they were more likely than any other group to have "done better" or "as well" during the separation and least likely to have "done worse." Wives of senior NCOs were very similar to the senior officers' wives in characterizing their separation experience, suggesting that experience with separations may be one of the keys to doing well during them.

FIGURE 11  
SPOUSES' SEPARATION EXPERIENCE RELATIVE  
TO AFTER SOLDIERS' RETURN



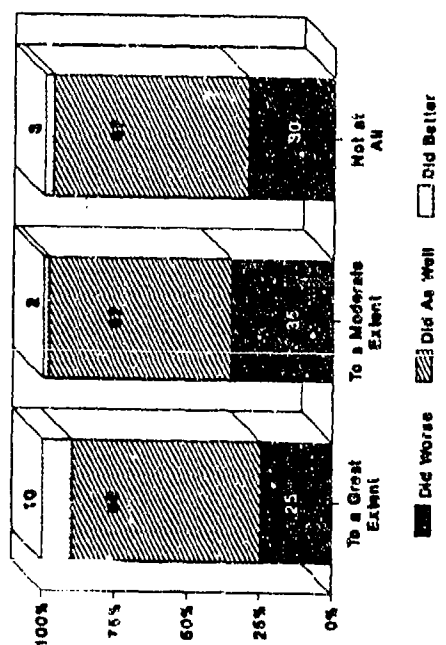
(Somewhat curious, however, is the finding that the wives of warrant officers, a typically seasoned group of soldiers, did no better than the most junior soldiers' wives.)

The results for the other four significant crosstabulations are presented in Figure 12 and summarized below:

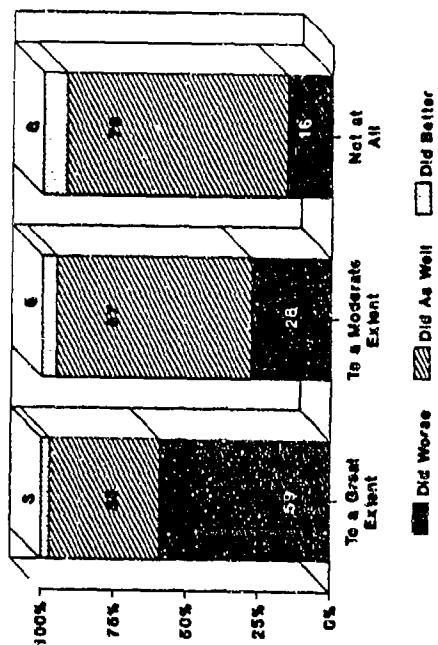
- Extent to which spouse became more independent. Among the wives who said they became more independent to a great or very great extent, nearly 10% said they did "better" during the separation compared to 3% or less for those whose independence changed only moderately or not at all. They were also the least likely to have done "worse" during the separation.
- Extent to which spouse had problems with the children. Wives who experienced problems with the children to a great extent during the separation were the least likely (compared to those with only moderate or no problems) to have done "better," the least likely to have done "as well," and considerably more likely than the others to have done "worse."
- Extent to which spouse had trouble making decisions alone. Spouses who had a great deal of trouble making decisions alone during the separation were the least likely (compared to those with only moderate or no decision-making problems) to have done as well both during and after the separation. They were also the most likely to have done "worse," (three times more likely than wives with no problems at all making decisions alone).
- Extent to which it took time to adapt to each other again after the soldier's return. Wives who reported great or very great problems adapting after the soldier's return were much more likely to say they did "better" during the separation than those with only moderate or no adaptation problems. This result may suggest that the reunion was sufficiently problematic to cause them to view the period of *separation* as "better." On the other end, wives who reported no adaptation problems after the soldier's return were least likely to have done better while he was away, most likely to have done as well, and least likely to have done worse.

FIGURE 12  
FACTORS AFFECTING SPOUSES' DESCRIPTION OF SEPARATION EXPERIENCE

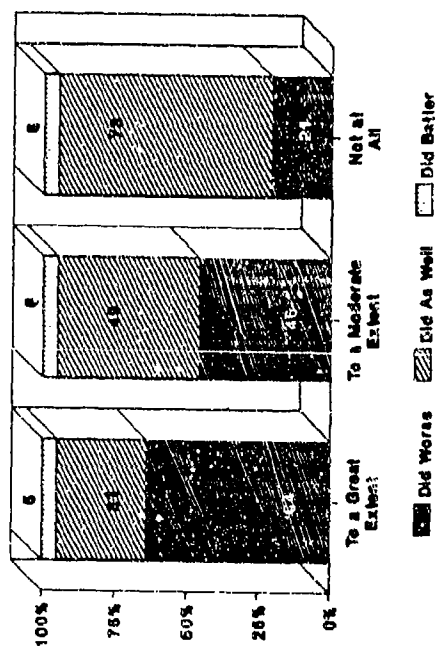
SPOUSE BECAME MORE INDEPENDENT...



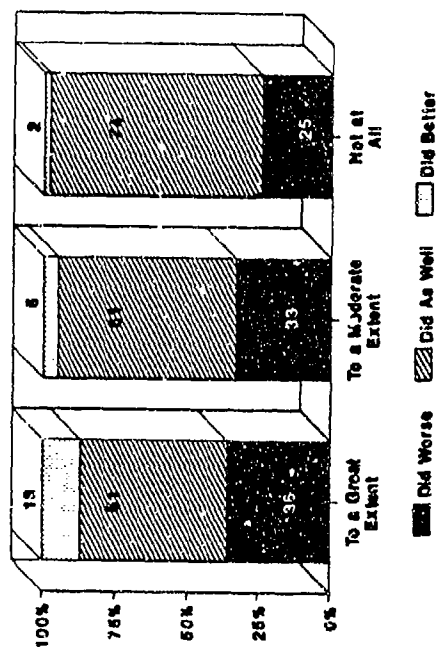
SPOUSE HAD PROBLEMS WITH THE CHILDREN...



SPOUSE HAD TROUBLE MAKING DECISIONS ALONE...



IT TOOK TIME TO ADAPT AFTER SOLDIER'S RETURN...





**Soldiers' Separation Assessment.** In this section we look at how the soldiers assessed their spouses' handling of the last separation. Soldiers were asked, "To what extent did you experience the following with your last separation?":

- My spouse became more independent
- I am proud of the way my spouse handled things when I was away.

As in the related spouse question, responses ranged from 1, "very great extent" to 5, "not at all." Table 10 summarizes the soldiers' responses to these two items.

**Table 10**  
**Distribution Of Soldier Opinions About Spouse Becoming**  
**More Independent And How She Handled Separation**

<u>Response</u>	<u>QUESTION</u>	
	<u>Spouse Became More Independent</u>	<u>Proud of Spouse Handling Things</u>
	(%)	(%)
Very great extent	10.9	43.3
Great extent	27.0	38.2
Moderate extent	34.8	12.5
Slight extent	14.6	3.4
Not at all	12.8	2.6

Most soldiers thought their spouses had become more independent during the separation, the majority (62%) responding to a "great" or "moderate" extent. This is similar to the spouses' responses, although theirs were spread more evenly across the five categories. Soldiers were somewhat more likely than spouses, however, to perceive a change in independence: fewer soldiers (about 13%) than spouses (17%) responded "not at all" to the question.

On the second item, the extent to which soldiers were proud of the way spouses handled things while they were away, soldiers responded quite favorably.

Fewer than 3% indicated they were "not at all" proud, and more than 80% felt proud to a "great" or "very great" extent. Correlations between these two soldier items and the comparable spouse questions (described on pages 55) were significant but not strong ( $r = .19$  for both).

The same set of 11 independent variables listed on page 56 was used to explore soldiers' responses to these two questions. Analysis of variance (regression analysis for length of time at current location) was used to examine their relationship to soldier assessments, once again treating the five response categories as a five point scale. In the 22 tests of significance, only one of the relationships was significant.

The length of the last extended separation was related to the soldiers' perception of their wives' changed independence. Soldiers who were away the longest (5 + months) were more likely than either of the other two groups (separations of 1-2 months and 3-4 months) to have reported that their wives became more independent during the separation to a "great" or "very great" extent. Similarly, they were the least likely to report no change at all. (For the spouses, on the other hand, there was no significant relationship between their own perceptions of their changed independence and the length of the last extended separation). Among all of the remaining tests, neither the soldiers' impressions of the spouses' increased independence nor soldier pride in the wives' ability to cope with the separation was related to any of these ten independent variables (soldier rank, unit location, age of youngest child, number of children, presence of children with problems, spouse employment status, on- or off-post housing, length of marriage, money problems, and length of time at current location).<sup>20</sup>

Summary. During separations the extent to which soldiers and spouses worry, as measured by the two Separation Anxiety Scales, varied significantly by soldier rank. Soldiers of lower rank and their spouses tend to worry more during

<sup>20</sup> The tests for "soldier proud" with length of marriage and money problems, while not achieving the .01 significance level, were close ( $p < .015$  and  $< .014$  respectively). Scale score differences between groups on the two independent variables were fairly small, however (at most, .33 of one point separated the four groups in the length of marriage variable; for money problems, .20 points separated the two groups).

separations than do more senior personnel. Other variables significantly related to the separation anxiety scale scores, though not as strongly as soldier rank, included: the age of the youngest child, spouse employment status, length of marriage, money problems, and the length of time the couple had been at the current location. Similar results were found for the soldier question addressing worries about the children's health and well-being while the soldier is away: junior soldiers worry more about their children than do senior personnel.

Spouses reported that, in general, they had become somewhat more independent during their last extended separation. Soldiers perceived the same change. Roughly two-thirds of the spouses reported trouble with the children while the soldier was gone, at least to some extent, but roughly two-thirds also reported no trouble at all making decisions alone in the soldiers' absence. Almost all of the spouses felt their husbands were proud of the way they had handled the separation, and soldier responses to the similar question confirmed that they were.

### After the Separation

The return of the soldier from an extended separation, while anxiously anticipated by most soldiers, their spouses and children, is often stressful and not a simple return to "normal," pre-separation status. During separations, some spouses become more independent and confident in their role as head of the family/chief decision-maker. Whether the soldier views his wife's handling of the separation with pride or resents her increased self-sufficiency may well have an impact on the success of the couple's reunion.

Both soldiers and spouses who had experienced a recent extended separation were asked to what extent "it took my spouse and me time to adapt to each other again after his/her return." The items were scored from 1, "to a very great extent," to 5, "not at all."

Overall, spouses who experienced a recent extended separation did not report having a difficult time adapting to their husbands' return. Roughly 40% of the wives said it took no time at all to adapt to each other after his return. Only

16% reported that the readjustment took time "to a very great" or "great extent." Soldiers, on the other hand, felt it took a little longer to adapt after their return. While 25% reported no problem at all, nearly double the percent of soldiers (30%) than spouses (16%) reported that it took time "to a very great" or "great extent." Figure 13 compares soldier and spouse assessments concerning time to re-adapt to each other after the soldier's return.

Any number of factors can affect the success of the reunions. To examine the relationships between these items and factors that might contribute to reunion outcome, we conducted analyses using analysis of variance and crosstabulations with the following independent variables:

- Soldier rank
- Region
- Family life course
- Number of children
- Presence of children with problems
- Spouse employment status
- Length of marriage
- Money problems
- Length of last separation
- Length of time at current location
- Assessment of spouse's changed independence
- Overall happiness of the marriage.<sup>21</sup>

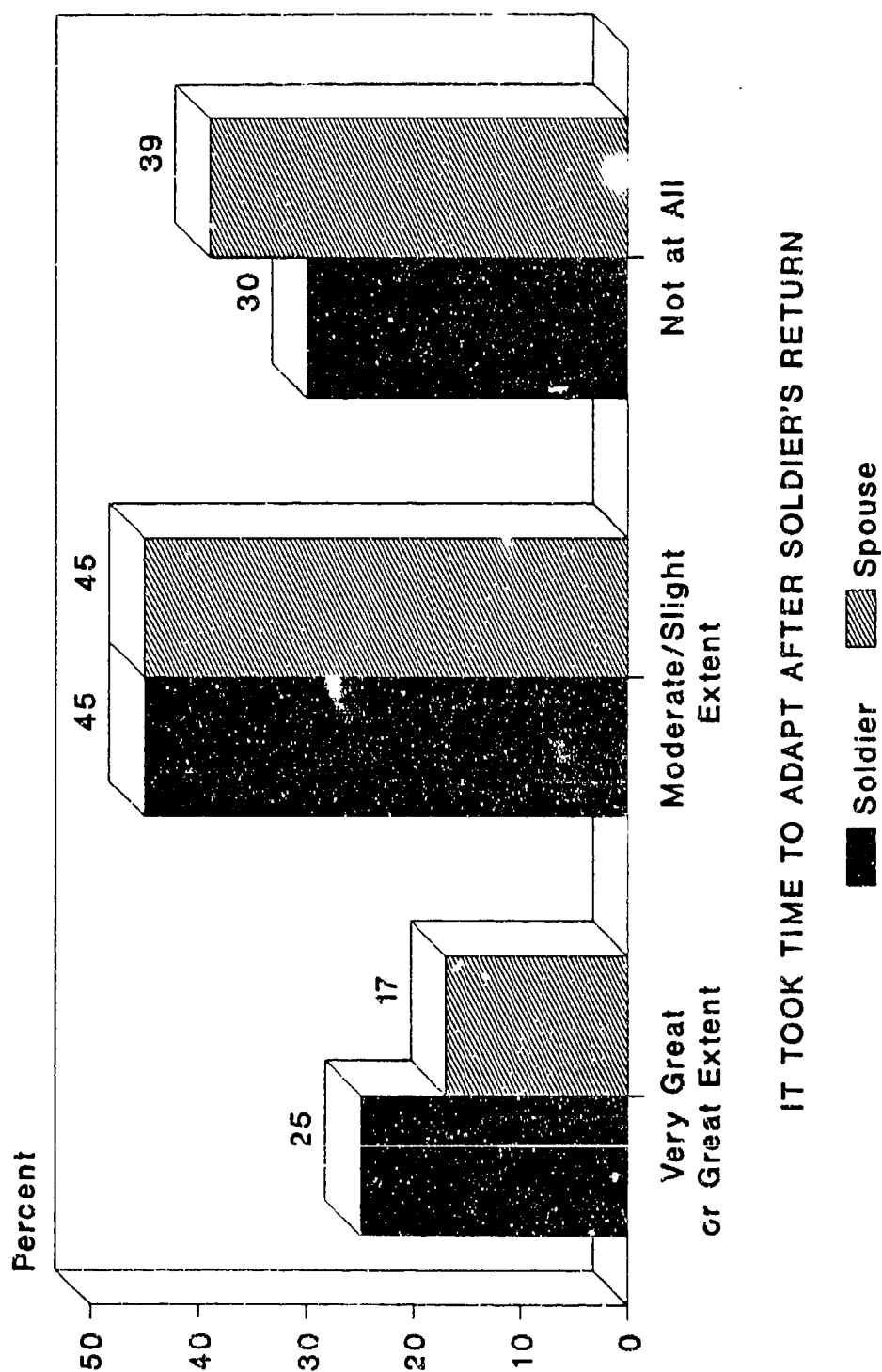
For both soldiers and spouses there were significant relationships between time to adapt and the following four variables:

- Length of last separation
- Assessment of spouse's changed independence
- Overall happiness of the marriage
- Money problems.

The results for each significant analysis are described below.

<sup>21</sup> The last three independent variables listed, length of time at current location, assessment of spouse's changed independence, and overall happiness of the marriage were continuous variables for which the analysis used was simple regression.

**FIGURE 13**  
**SOLDIER AND SPOUSE ASSESSMENT OF**  
**READAPTING AFTER LAST EXTENDED SEPARATION**



For both soldiers and spouses, those who experienced longer separations felt it took more time to adapt after the soldier's return than did those whose separations were shorter ( $R^2 = .083$  for soldiers and  $.09$  for spouses). For separations of less than three months, only 12% of spouses and 18% of soldiers reported that it took time "to a great or very great extent" to adapt after the soldier's return. On the other hand, for separations of five months or longer, 41% of spouses and nearly half of the soldiers indicated serious problems re-adapting to each other. Figure 14 summarizes these data for both spouses and soldiers.

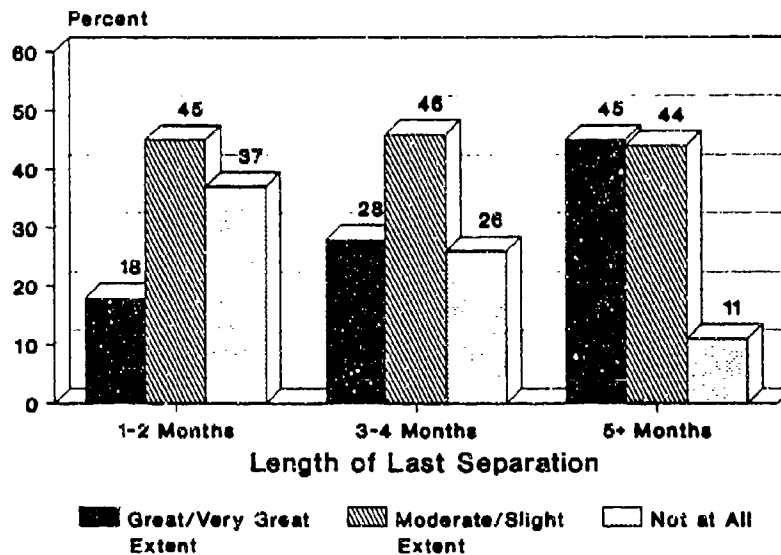
There is a significant positive relationship between the extent to which spouses felt they had become more independent during the last separation and time to adapt after it ( $r = .27$ ). Spouses who reported that they had become more independent were more likely to have husbands who experienced trouble adapting or to experience such difficulty themselves.

As indicated earlier, about 40% of spouses overall believed they had become more independent to a great extent, about 43% moderately so, and 17% not at all. For the "no change" group, 63% responded that it took no time at all to re-adapt after the separation. Among spouses who had become a great deal more independent, however, only 28% felt the readjustment took no time at all. The reverse is also true: among spouses who said they had *not* become more independent, only 5% reported that it took a great deal of time to re-adapt after the soldier's return. Spouses who had become considerably more independent, on the other hand, were five times more likely than those with "no change" to have major trouble adapting after the separation. The top graph of Figure 15, following Figure 14, illustrates the relationship between spouses' reports of changed independence and time to adapt to each other after the soldier comes home.

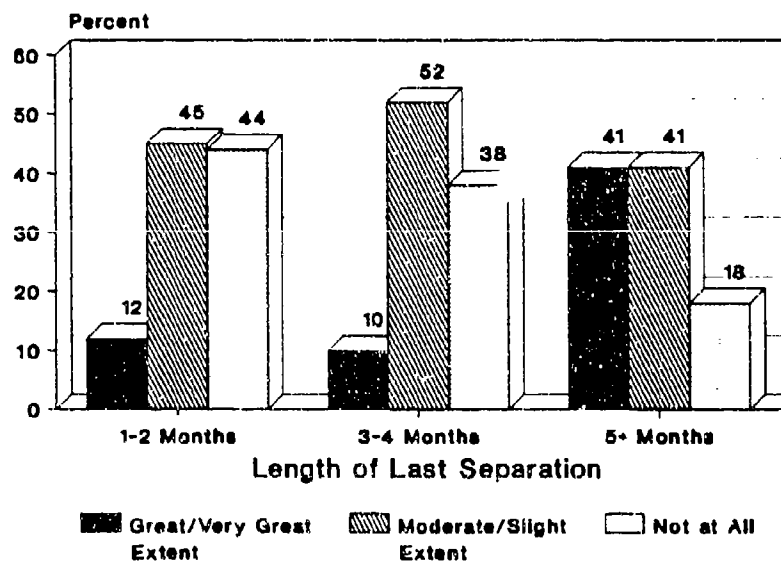
The results for soldiers are similar: there is a significant positive relationship between the extent to which soldiers felt their spouses had become more independent during the last separation and the time it took to adapt after their return ( $r = .27$ ). That is, the more independent soldiers thought their wives had

**FIGURE 14**  
**EXTENT TO WHICH SOLDIER/SPOUSE NEEDED TIME TO**  
**READJUST AFTER SEPARATION BY LENGTH OF**  
**LAST SEPARATION**

**SOLDIERS**

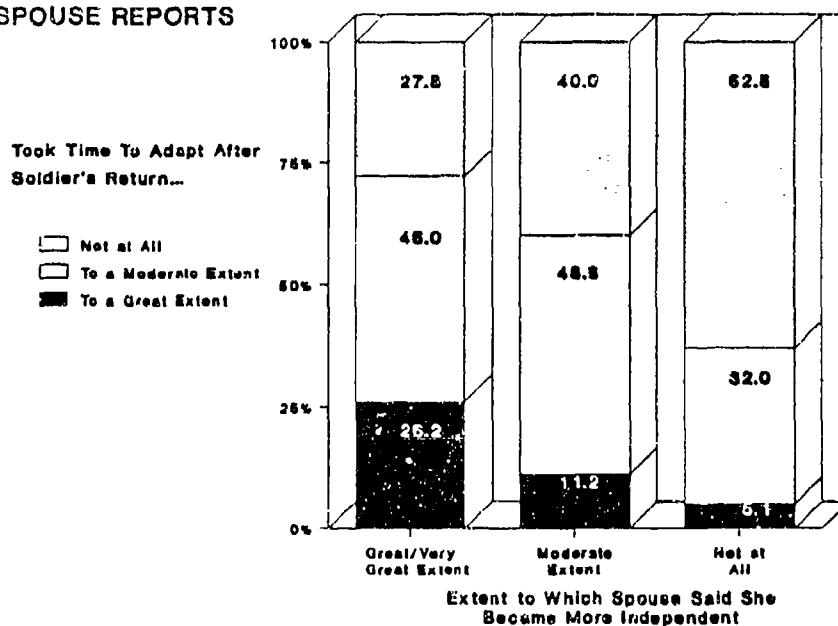


**SPOUSES**

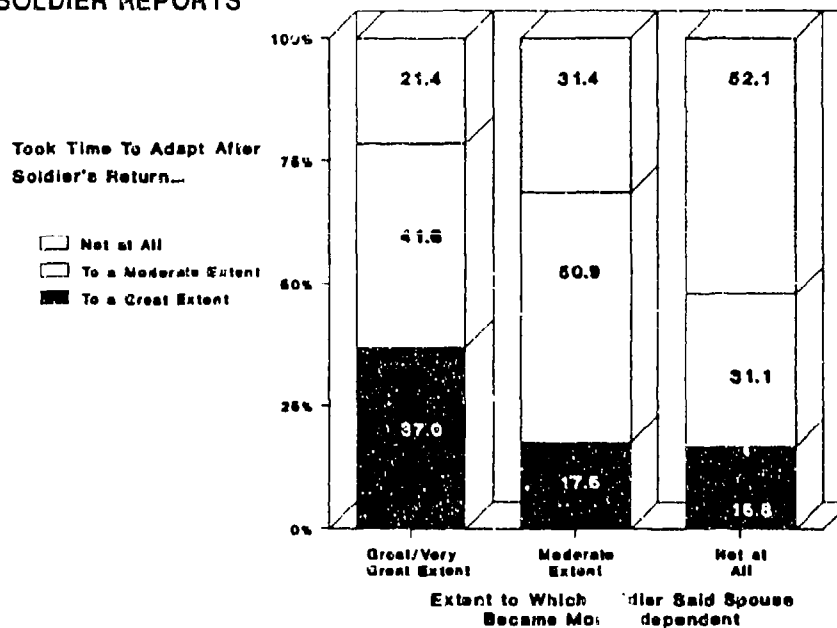


**FIGURE 15**  
**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPOUSE'S CHANGED**  
**INDEPENDENCE AND TIME TO ADAPT AFTER**  
**SOLDIER'S RETURN**

**SPOUSE REPORTS**



**SOLDIER REPORTS**





become, the more time they felt it took to adapt to each other after his return. The data also indicate that although the trend for both soldiers and spouses is in the same direction (increased spouse independence leads to a longer period of readjustment after the separation), soldiers perceive that the readjustment period is longer than do spouses.

For both soldiers and spouses a small but significant relationship exists between time to adapt after separation and money problems ( $R^2 = .015$  and  $.019$  respectively). Both groups reported slightly more difficulty adapting to each other after the soldier's return where there were money problems (i.e., trouble paying the bills in at least one of the last twelve months).

One of the strongest relationships was between time to adapt and the spouse's overall assessment of the happiness of the marriage, based on the survey question, "On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means very unhappy and 7 means very happy, how would you describe your marriage, overall?" As the overall happiness of the marriage increases, the extent to which it takes time to adapt after the separation decreases ( $r = .36$ ). The same relationship, though less strong ( $r = .27$ ), also holds true for soldiers, who were asked the same question.

In a final analysis to further explore factors associated with "reentry" problems (or successes) after a separation, we conducted a multiple regression analysis using the spouse question, "To what extent [did it] take my spouse and me time to adapt to each other again after his return" as the dependent variable. The five response categories ("very great extent" to "not at all") were treated as a five-point scale for the analysis. The procedure used was first to estimate a model with a number of factors hypothesized to affect the extent of readjustment problems and then to systematically remove from the model those variables that did not contribute significantly to the outcome. Initially, 12 variables were selected for the model:

- Soldier rank
- Length of the last separation
- Money problems

- Extent to which spouse had problems with children during the last separation
- Extent to which spouse became more independent during the last separation
- Extent to which spouse feels a commitment to the Army
- Extent to which spouse feels the Army is responsive to family needs
- Extent to which spouse understands demands of Army job
- Spouse's opinion that when family needs conflict with Army needs, the family should come first
- Overall happiness of the marriage
- Extent to which spouse had trouble making decisions alone during the last separation
- Length of time at current location.

The final resulting model<sup>22</sup> after deleting non-significant variables is presented in Figure 16. Five of these variables explained 30.1% of the variance in the dependent variable: problems making decisions alone during the last separation,<sup>23</sup> overall happiness of the marriage, problems with the children, length of last separation, and the extent to which the spouse became more independent.<sup>24</sup> These results suggest that for spouses, it will take less time to adapt to each other after the soldier returns when she doesn't experience too many problems making decisions alone during the separation, has a generally happy marriage, and does not experience too many child-related problems while the soldier is away. In addition, when the separation is shorter, and when she becomes more independent *to a lesser extent* or not at all during the separation, time to adapt is reduced.

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<sup>22</sup> This preliminary model would undoubtedly benefit from further analysis, including generation of a comparable soldier "reentry" model. While modeling of this nature was beyond the scope and resources available for this report, this exploratory analysis suggests that additional modeling might be extremely productive.

<sup>23</sup> On these two items, problems with the children and problems making decisions alone, a higher score meant fewer problems.

<sup>24</sup> The lower the score, the more independent the spouse said she became.

**FIGURE 16**  
**FINAL MODEL**  
**FACTORS AFFECTING TIME TO READAPT FOR SPOUSES**

	<u>Standardized Regression Coefficient</u>	<u>Sampling Error of the Regression Coefficients</u>
Intercept	-0.555	0.297
Length of Last Separation		
1-2 Months	0.604	0.131
3-4 Months	0.579	0.196
5 + Months	0.000	0.000
Problems with the children during separation	0.110	0.039
Overall happiness of the marriage	0.236	0.039
Problems making decisions alone during separation	0.362	0.046
Separation made spouse more independent*	0.123	0.047

$R^2 = .301$ ( $p < .001$ for overall model) $n = 592$
---

\*  $P < .012$  for this variable; all others are  $p < .01$

Finally, to examine the extent to which soldiers and spouses concur on certain issues, their responses to like survey items were correlated. For these analyses, the "soldiers with spouses" data set was used and the following correlations were significant:

- Overall happiness of the marriage  $r = .37$
- It took my spouse and me time to adapt:  $r = .35$
- Spouse became more independent:  $r = .19$ .

All of the relationships are positive, indicating that for the most part, soldiers and spouses "think in the same direction." Among the three, soldiers and spouses are in the most agreement about the overall happiness of their marriage. They are in the least accord about the extent to which the spouse became more independent during the last separation. As discussed above, soldiers were more likely to report their spouses became more independent than were the spouses themselves. It may be that soldiers and spouses applied somewhat different definitions of "more independent" in responding to this item and therefore view *changes* in spouse independence from different perspectives.

Summary. Although not all returning soldiers and their spouses face a readjustment period after an extended separation, many couples do require some time to re-adapt to each other. Overall, 25% more soldiers than spouses reported that it took time to some extent to adapt to each other after the soldier's return. The extent to which the spouse had problems making decisions alone was a significant factor in how long it took, as was the extent to which she became more independent during the separation, in the eyes of either the soldier or the spouse, was related to how long it took to readjust. The length of the separation as well as the overall happiness of the marriage also were factors in the amount of time it took to re-adapt after the separation.

### Overall Assessment and Future Coping Predictions

In this section we discuss the spouses' overall assessment of their last extended separation experience. We also present results of analyses using two

other separation-related measures, the Soldier and Spouse Separation Coping Scales, which predict spouses' future coping abilities.

Spouses' Overall Assessment of the Separation Experience. The last of the three survey questions posed to spouses who had an extended separation in the last 12 months asked, "Overall, how would you say you handled this separation experience?" The categories and distribution of their responses were the following:

- |   |                       |        |
|---|-----------------------|--------|
| ● | 1 = "Very poorly"     | 2.9%   |
| ● | 2 = "Somewhat poorly" | 5.6%   |
| ● | 3 = "Undecided"       | 9.8%   |
| ● | 4 = "Somewhat well"   | 39.3%  |
| ● | 5 = "Very well"       | 42.3%. |

On the whole, spouses felt they handled their separations quite successfully: 81.6% of them said they handled the separation either "very well" or "somewhat well." Fewer than one in ten thought they handled it poorly.

Treating the response categories as a five-point scale and using analysis of variance, we examined the relationship between this item (referred to in the following discussions as "overall handling") and the following independent variables:

- Soldier rank
- Family life course (age of youngest child)
- Length of marriage
- Money problems
- Extent to which spouse became more independent
- Extent to which spouse and soldier took time to re-adapt
- Length of last extended separation
- Length of time at current location.<sup>25</sup>

Four of the tests were significant; their results are summarized below.

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<sup>25</sup> The last three variables on the list are continuous, for which regression analysis was used.

Soldier rank was significantly related to "overall handling" of the last extended separation, but differences between the rank categories were small, as was the explained variance ( $R^2 = .026$ ). Spouses of field grade officers reported the best overall handling of the separation, with a mean score of 4.62. Junior enlisted spouses (PVT to CPL) had the lowest mean score at 3.93; all others were between 4.11 and 4.50.

Length of marriage, like rank, was significantly related to "overall handling" but the explained variance was small ( $R^2 = .029$ ). Spouses who had been married the longest, four years or more, on the whole did better, with a mean "overall handling" score of 4.22, than did those with fewer years of marriage. The mean "overall handling" scores declined steadily from the high of 4.22 to 3.60 for spouses who had been married less than a year.

Money problems also were related to spouses' overall handling of the separation. Those who had trouble paying their bills at least once in the past 12 months had a mean score of 3.94, while those without bill problems had a mean of 4.23. This variable explained 2% of the variance.

The extent to which it took time to adapt after the separation also was significantly related to the spouses' overall assessment of the experience. The less difficulty they reported in adapting to each other after the soldier returned, the higher their "overall handling" score. For each point the difficulty of adapting decreased (on the five-point "adapting" scale described on page 64), the "overall handling" score increased by .15 point. The explained variance was 3.7 percent. This result would tend to support the prevailing belief that it is not just the period of *absence* that defines the separation experience, but also, to some extent, both the period and the quality of the couple's *reunion*.

We conducted one additional analysis with this question concerning overall handling of the separation experience to explore (if not fully explain) what might cause a spouse to say, "I did OK with this separation." To do this we conducted a multiple regression analysis using the Spouse Survey question, "Overall, how would you say you handled this separation experience?" as the dependent

variable, where the response categories formed a five-point scale from "very poorly" to "very well." The procedure used, as previously described, was to estimate a model that included a number of factors hypothesized to affect the spouses' overall assessment of their separation experience and then to remove from the model those variables that did not contribute significantly to the outcome. The initial variables selected were:

- Soldier rank
- Spouse understands demands of Army job
- Money problems
- Emergency cash available
- Spouse became more independent
- Time to adapt after the soldier's return
- Spouse's opinion that when family needs conflict with Army needs, the family should come first
- Length of the last separation
- Problems with children during the separation.

The final model<sup>26</sup> after deleting non-significant variables is presented in Figure 17.

Three of the independent variables, soldier rank, the extent to which the spouse had trouble with the children,<sup>27</sup> and the extent to which she understands the demands of the soldier's Army job<sup>28</sup> explain nearly 11% of the variance in the dependent variable. This model suggests that the higher the soldier's rank, the more the spouse understands the demands of his job, and the fewer problems she has with the children during the separation, the better she will experience the separation. From a practical standpoint, these results suggest that the Army may realize a considerable payoff in ensuring that spouses do understand and appreciate the demands of the soldier's Army job. To the extent that this

<sup>26</sup> This exploratory model, like the one presented in Figure 16, also would benefit from further analysis, including the examination of other potentially important survey variables.

<sup>27</sup> On this item a higher score meant fewer problems.

<sup>28</sup> Spouse Survey question which asked the extent to which you agree with the statement, "I understand the demands of my spouse's Army job"; response categories ranged from 1, "strongly agree" to 5, "strongly disagree."

**FIGURE 17**  
**FINAL MODEL**  
**SPOUSES' OVERALL HANDLING OF THE LAST EXTENDED SEPARATION**

	<u>Standardized Regression Coefficient</u>	<u>Sampling Error of the Regression Coefficients</u>
Intercept	4.569	0.160
Soldier paygrade group		
PVT-CPL	-0.595	0.080
SGT-SSG	-0.327	0.075
SFC-SGM	-0.217	0.112
WO1-WO4	-0.367	0.217
2LT-CPT	-0.329	0.080
MAJ-COL	0.000	0.000
Spouse understands demands of soldier's Army job	-0.277	0.055
Problems with children during the separation	0.115	0.055

$R^2 = .108$ ( $p < .001$ for overall model) $n = 1128$
--



understanding potentially reduces her resentment (or increases her acceptance) of extended separations, and they are more positively experienced overall, both the family and the Army benefit.

**Coping With Future Separations.** All soldiers and spouses, whether or not they had had an extended separation in the last 12 months, were asked how much of a coping problem future separations of varying lengths would be. Soldiers were asked how much of a problem they thought their spouses would have, and spouses were asked how much trouble they thought they, themselves, would have. These two survey questions were used to form the Soldier and Spouse Separation Coping Scales, described in Figure 18, on the next page. Analysis of variance was used to examine scale score differences between groups for the six rank categories, family life course (i.e., age of youngest child), length of marriage, and, for those who had them, the length of the last separation.

Rank was related to coping ability for both soldiers and spouses ( $R^2 = .086$  and  $.068$  respectively). Table 11 presents the mean separation coping scale scores for both soldiers and spouses by rank. Junior enlisted soldiers thought their spouses would have the most trouble coping, as did the spouses themselves.

**Table 11**  
**Separation Coping Mean Scale Scores for Soldiers and Spouses**

	<u>Soldiers</u>	<u>Spouses</u>
PVT-CPL	12.88	13.40
SGT-SSG	14.61	15.24
SFC-SGM	15.89	16.16
WO1-WO4	15.95	15.77
2LT-CPT	14.94	14.99
MAJ-COL	15.71	15.71
Overall	14.46	14.87

(4 = Very Serious Problem Coping to 20 = No Problem Coping)

**FIGURE 18**  
**SOLDIER AND SPOUSE SEPARATION COPING SCALES**

**SEPARATION COPING SCALES**

**Soldier** scale based on responses to:

"How much of problem would your spouse have coping if you had to go away on Army assignment, such as TDY or deployment, for..."

**Spouse** scale based on responses to:

"How much of a problem would you have coping if your spouse went away on Army assignment, such as TDY or deployment, for..."

- Less than 2 weeks
- 2 weeks to a month
- Several months
- Six months.

Items in the scale range from 1, "very serious problem coping," to 5, "no problem coping." The range for each scale is from 4 to 20.

Soldiers, however, were somewhat more pessimistic than spouses about how much of a problem they would have. Senior personnel (senior NCOs, warrant officers, and senior officers) had the highest scale scores. Roughly the same pattern held true for their spouses.

Family life course stage (age of the youngest child) also was significantly related to coping ability for both soldiers and spouses ( $R^2 = .023$  and  $.038$ , respectively) and the same pattern held true for both. In families where the youngest child is older than five, both the soldier and the spouse thought the spouse would have less trouble coping than in families with no children or where the youngest child is under five. Once again, spouse scale scores were slightly higher than soldier scores for each of the three family life course categories. Mean scores for each were as follows:

	<u>Soldiers</u>	<u>Spouses</u>
● No children	14.07	14.03
● Youngest < 5	14.14	14.59
● Youngest $\geq$ 5	15.41	16.01

That soldiers and spouses without children anticipate the most trouble coping with separations may be attributed to the fact that they are relatively younger and less experienced than those whose youngest child is at least five years old.

The relationship with length of marriage, also significant for both soldiers and spouses, follows the same pattern ( $R^2 = .079$  and  $.056$  respectively). Couples married the longest (four years or more) had the highest scale scores, and couples married for less than a year, the lowest. Mean scores for the four length-of-marriage categories were as follows:

	<u>Soldiers</u>	<u>Spouses</u>
● Less than a year	12.46	13.10
● One year	12.51	13.88
● 2 to 3 years	13.52	13.91
● 4+ years	15.19	15.51

The relationship between the separation coping scales and the length of the last extended separation was not significant for soldiers or spouses.

We also correlated the separation coping scales with the spouses' overall assessment of their last separation (described above) to test the "past is prologue" hypothesis. That is, do spouses who have had a generally successful recent separation anticipate less trouble coping in the future? The data suggest they do.

There was a fairly strong positive relationship between the independent variable, "Overall, how would you say you handled this separation experience" and separation coping ( $r = .48$ ). For every one point of increase on the five-point "overall handling" scale, the spouses' separation coping scale score increased almost two points (1.74). There was a similar, though less strong relationship between the soldier separation coping scale and spouses' handling of the last separation ( $r = .26$ ). The higher correlation of spouse coping with their overall assessment of handling the separation is to be expected since the "overall handling" question was answered by spouses. Spouse attitudes about the separation are nonetheless reflected by the soldiers in their predictions about their spouses' future separation coping abilities.

Finally, using analysis of variance we examined whether any of the three "preparedness" variables (whether or not the couple had a power of attorney, a joint checking account or emergency funds) were related to predictions of *future* separation coping problems. For soldiers, all three variables were related. Having a power of attorney raised the coping scale on average by .97 points; a joint checking account raised the scale score on average .81 points; and having the equivalent of two weeks' pay for emergencies raised the coping scale by 1.49 points. Explained variance was largest for the emergency funds (3.9%).

For spouses, having a joint checking account was not significantly related to future separation coping, but the other two items were. Having a power of attorney raised the spouse coping scale score on average by .52 points; the presence of emergency funds raised the spouse separation coping scale on

average by .88 points. Once again, explained variance was largest for the emergency funds (1.3%).

Summary. On the whole, spouses reported handling their last extended separations quite well. This is not to suggest they didn't experience problems or frustrations during their husbands' absence, but whatever these were, most spouses "handled" them and the overall experience at least "somewhat well." The results of an exploratory multiple regression analysis suggest that the soldier's paygrade, the extent to which the spouse had problems with children during the separation, and the spouse's understanding of her husband's job are key to her overall assessment of the separation experience.

The extent to which future separations were predicted to be a problem for spouses varied by rank, suggesting that experience and other characteristics associated with increasing rank may serve to reduce some of the difficulties of coping with separations. The results of one of the analyses indicated that having had a recent "successful" separation was significantly associated with expectations of fewer coping problems in future separations. The implication of this finding is that to the extent the Army can smooth the road to "success" in the first separation experienced by the families of junior personnel, that road will tend to appear much less daunting to those who have to go down it again in the future.

### Summary

In general, soldiers and their families were reasonably well "prepared" for separations based on the three measures discussed (power of attorney, joint checking account, and emergency cash reserves). For all three items there was significant variation across rank categories, the most notable and predictable for emergency cash. Overall, senior personnel were "more prepared" than were junior soldiers, but even among the junior enlisted (PVT to CPL), more than half had powers of attorney and nearly three quarters had joint checking accounts. For soldiers, having emergency cash available and a joint checking account were associated with lower anxiety while away from home.

The extent to which soldiers and spouses worry while the soldier is away, as measured by the two Separation Anxiety Scales, varied significantly by soldier rank. Soldiers in the lower enlisted ranks tend to worry more about their families than do more senior personnel. The trend was similar for spouses. Other variables such as age of the youngest child, length of marriage, and money problems also were related to separation worries, but as all of these are correlated with soldier rank, rank remains a key factor through which the Army can target services to families at risk of separation problems or worries.

Readapting to each other after the soldier's return took some time for some couples. Soldiers were more likely than spouses to report that it took time to readapt after the separation. Several variables, including the length of the separation, the extent to which the spouse had become more independent during the soldier's absence, the overall happiness of the marriage, and whether or not the couple was experiencing trouble paying their bills, all were independently related to the amount of time it took the couple to adapt to each other, for both soldiers and spouses. In addition, the exploratory multivariate analysis with the spouse version of this question (time to adapt after the soldier's return) suggests that five variables explain almost a third of the variance in the time-to-adapt variable. Three of the five are the same as noted above (overall happiness of the marriage, length of the separation, and extent to which the spouse became more independent). Additionally, however, the extent to which the spouse had problems making decisions alone was the most significant contributor to the model<sup>28</sup>; the extent to which she had problems with the children also was a factor in time to adapt after the separation.

Overall, spouses felt they had handled their last extended separation well, more than 80% either very or somewhat well; fewer than 10% thought they had handled it poorly. Of the four independent variables found to be significantly related to this spouse assessment of the separation, the extent to which it took time to adapt after the separation was the strongest. Soldier rank, length of the marriage, and money problems also were significantly related to the spouse's

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<sup>28</sup> This item and "money problems" were related ( $p < .013$ ). The variable "money problems" is also significantly related to soldier rank ( $p < .001$ ).

overall assessment of how well she handled the separation. Another exploratory multivariate analysis with this item, though not as explanatory as the time-to-adapt model, suggests that in addition to soldier rank, the extent to which the spouse had trouble with the children and the extent to which she understands the demands of the soldier's Army job also contribute to her overall assessment of the separation experience.

The past may well be prologue for spouses with a successful extended separation experience. There was a strong relationship between the spouses' overall assessment of their last separation and their predictions of future coping ability. These coping predictions also varied significantly by soldier rank, suggesting also that experience with past separations (which comes with increasing rank) may be among the best predictors of success with future separations. Furthermore, for soldiers, all three "preparedness" variables were significantly related to their predictions of their spouses' future coping abilities, though having emergency cash reserves was the strongest relationship. For spouses, having a joint checking account was not significantly related to their predictions of future coping, but the other two were (emergency funds more strongly than power of attorney).

## Role of Formal and Informal Support Systems

Support for families when the soldier is away can come from both formal and informal systems. Formal support systems would include programs the Army offers and the chain of command itself, in the form of support from unit leadership. Informal systems include the spouse's network of friends and family that can be relied upon for help or support during the soldier's absence. This section of the report examines the role of both formal and informal support systems during family separations. First we examine the role and impact of Army programs and unit leadership in separations. The results of similar analyses focused on informal support systems are then presented.

### Formal Support: Army Programs and Unit Leadership

Use and Usefulness of Army Services and Programs. Both the soldier and spouse surveys asked, "How useful is it (or would it be) for the Army to provide the following [38] programs and services at your current location?" The response categories included "very useful," "somewhat useful," and "not useful." In addition, the item asked, "Then, tell us whether you have ever used these services and programs at your current location," for which the responses were "yes" and "no." Among the 38 services and programs listed, two<sup>30</sup> were relevant to family separations:

- "Services for families separated from soldier"
- "Programs for spouses during TDYs/deployments/mobilizations."

Results of the first part of the question, "how *useful* is it to provide these services..." are presented in Figure 19, which includes both soldier and spouse responses.

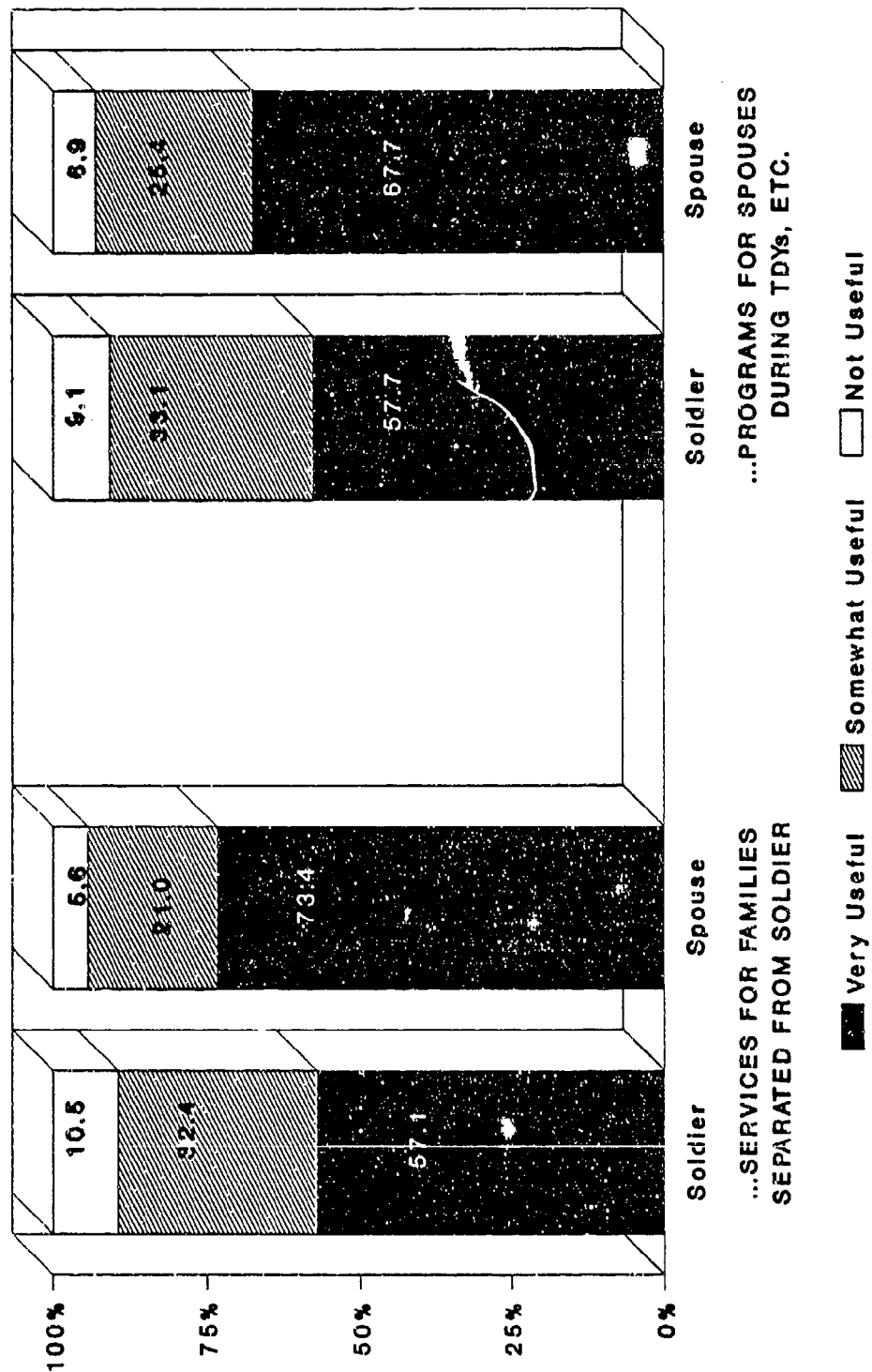
Overall the majority of both soldiers and spouses think it is "very useful" for the Army to provide programs and services for separated families. Spouses,

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<sup>30</sup> For a more complete discussion of Army support program utilization based on AFRP research, see Devine, Bullman & Gaston, (1992).



FIGURE 19  
SOLDIER AND SPOUSE REPORTS OF "HOW USEFUL  
FOR ARMY TO PROVIDE..." AT CURRENT LOCATION



however, generally were more inclined than soldiers to consider them useful for the Army to provide. Roughly 30% more spouses than soldiers rated "services for families separated from the soldier" as "very useful"; similarly, about 17% more spouses than soldiers rated spouse TDY programs "very useful." Although very few respondents overall rated these services and programs "not useful," soldiers were more likely than spouses to do so.

Their perceived *value* notwithstanding, services and programs for separated families were not reported to have been widely used at the respondents' current location. Among spouses, 7.8% said they had used "services for families separated from the soldier," and only 4.7% had used "programs for spouses during TDYs." Soldier utilization was only slightly higher, at 10.7% and 7.8% respectively for the two services.

Even among spouses who reported an extended separation in the last 12 months, reported use of these two separation services was very low (9.4% for "services for families separated from the soldier" and 6.4% for "programs for spouses during TDYs"). Soldier results were similar, if slightly higher: 13.2% and 11.4% use at the current location for the two services, respectively.

These reports of limited service use should be interpreted cautiously for several reasons. First, it is possible that some soldiers and spouses said they had not used these services simply because they are not available at their *current* location or the family is unaware of their availability. Furthermore, services of this nature may have been used at the previous location but were not required at this one. On the other hand, some studies (see Devine et al., 1992) suggest that families are reluctant to use certain support services because of the perceived stigma attached and/or career risks to the soldier. Finally, since the survey questions referred to unspecified "services" and "programs," it is possible that respondents *had used* a relevant service or program but, unsure of exactly what they had used, may have indicated "no" to one or both of these items.

To investigate the relationship between service use and usefulness and a number of soldier and family characteristics, both of these items ("services for

families separated from the soldier" and "programs for spouses during TDYs") were crosstabulated for both soldiers and spouses with the following ten variables:

- Soldier rank
- Region (CONUS, Europe and other OCONUS locations)
- Family life course (age of youngest child)
- Number of children
- Presence of children with problems
- Spouse employment status
- On- or off-post housing
- Length of marriage
- Money problems
- Length of time at current location.

Among the 40 resultant crosstabulations<sup>31</sup> for spouse data, only two showed significant differences across groups.

Spouses with money problems (i.e., trouble paying the bills in at least one of the last 12 months) were somewhat more likely to rate "programs for spouses during TDYs" as "very useful" (71.3%) than were spouses without money problems (65.8%). The other significant difference was between the three location categories (i.e., CONUS, Europe, and other OCONUS locations) and use of "programs for spouses during TDYs." Among the small number of spouses who reported using these programs overall, spouses in other OCONUS locations were somewhat more likely than those in CONUS or Europe to report having used them (6.3%, 5.6%, and 2.3% respectively).

The same series of tests was conducted with the comparable soldier items for "use" and "usefulness" of separation services. For soldiers, seven of the 40 crosstabulations showed significant differences: four with rank, two with length of marriage, and one with money problems.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Use" and "usefulness" data for both service areas by the 10 independent variables.

<sup>32</sup> Both length of marriage and "money problems" are significantly related to rank.

Table 12 summarizes the results of the four significant tests with paygrade. Senior enlisted soldiers are the most likely to believe that it is "very useful" (62.5%) for the Army to provide services for families that are separated; junior enlisted were least likely to consider them "very useful" (52.3%). Senior NCOs were also the most likely (63.8%) to report it "very useful" for the Army to provide programs for spouses during TDYs. In this case, warrant officers (42.5%) and senior officers (45.5%) were least likely to suggest it "very useful" for the Army to provide such services. Senior NCOs were also the most likely of the six rank categories to have *used* either of the two types of separation services.

**Table 12**  
**Relationship Between Rank And Use/Usefulness**  
**Of Army Separation Services**

	Soldier Rank					
	<u>PVT-CPL</u>	<u>SGT-SSG</u>	<u>SFC-SGM</u>	<u>WO1-WO4</u>	<u>2LT-CPT</u>	<u>MAJ-COL</u>
<b><i>Useful for the Army to Provide:</i></b>						
(% "Very Useful")						
Services for separated families	52.3	59.1	62.5	53.1	55.4	55.2
Programs for spouses during TDYs	55.3	61.4	63.8	42.5	54.3	45.5
<b><i>Have Used Service at Current Location:</i></b>						
(% "Yes")						
Services for separated families	8.9	12.6	13.1	9.0	7.6	6.8
Programs for spouses during TDYs	5.0	8.0	11.8	7.3	54.3	10.6

Length of marriage was related to soldiers' belief that it is *useful* for the Army to provide services for separated families and the *use* of spouse TDY programs. Soldiers married four years or longer were more likely to consider it "very useful" for the Army to provide services for separated families than were soldiers married 2-3 years or a year or less (59.1%, 50.6%, and 55.6% respectively). Soldiers married four years or longer also were more likely to have reported using spouse TDY programs (the range of those reporting "yes" was from

4.8% for married less than a year to 9.1% for married four years or more). Finally, soldiers with money problems were slightly more likely than those without (60.2% and 56.5% respectively) to suggest that it was "very useful" for the Army to provide spouse TDY programs.

In the final analyses using these items ("services for families separated from soldier" and "programs for spouses during TDYs/deployments/mobilizations") we examined whether reported *use* of either of the two was related to soldier and spouse separation anxiety (measured by the two Separation Anxiety scales described in Figure 1 on page 20) or to predictions of future separation coping problems (measured by the two Separation Coping scales described in Figure 18 on page 79). It was hypothesized that soldiers and spouses who use separation-related services may be less anxious during separations and may anticipate fewer problems coping with them. One-way analysis of variance was used to test for differences between groups (users and non-users of the services) on the various scales. Among the eight tests (soldier/spouse each by two types of services for two scales), all of the results were likely to have occurred by chance (i.e., none was significant). This outcome may result at least in part from the disproportionate sizes of the user/non-user groups (reported program/service usage by soldiers and spouses was, *at best*, an estimated 10.7% of the population).

Lacking specific information on which separation programs/services soldiers and their spouses value and use, it is difficult to reach definitive conclusions about these two service-use items. In general, however, it is clear that both soldiers and spouses believe it is useful for the Army to provide separation-related services to families when the soldier is away. Additional program-specific research would help to identify which families use and benefit from the various types of separation services the Army provides.

Unit Leader Support. An additional area in which the "formal" Army system can support separated families is through the attitudes and practices of unit leadership. It was hypothesized that the extent to which unit leaders were perceived by soldiers and their spouses to be supportive and caring of Army families, then the level of separation-worries and coping problems might be expected to decline during separations. Two scales based on Soldier and Spouse

Survey items were created to measure unit leader family support. These scales are described in Figure 20.<sup>33</sup>

To examine whether unit leader family support was related to separation anxiety and separation coping, the Separation Anxiety Scales and Separation Coping Scales were correlated (using Pearson correlations) with the Unit Leader Family Support Scales for both soldiers and spouses. This produced four correlations, all of which were significant though small:

- Soldier Unit Leader Family Support with Soldier Separation Anxiety,  $r = .198$ , representing an explained variance of 3.9% in the Separation Anxiety scale score.
- Soldier Unit Leader Family Support with Soldier Separation Coping,  $r = .183$ , for explained variance of 3.3% in the Separation Coping scale score.
- Spouse Unit Leader Family Support with Spouse Separation Coping,  $r = .124$ , for explained variance of 1.5% in the Separation Coping scale score.
- Spouse Unit Leader Family Support with Spouse Separation Anxiety,  $r = .119$ , explaining 1.4% of the variance in the Spouse Separation Anxiety scale score.

These results suggest that for both soldiers and spouses, increased unit leader family support is associated with *lower* separation anxiety<sup>34</sup> and predictions of *fewer* spouse coping problems, both of which results were hypothesized to occur. For both the separation anxiety and coping measures, the relationship with unit leader support of families was stronger for soldiers than for spouses, also a result that would be expected, given the primacy of the soldier's relationship with the Army and Army leadership sentiment. In general, soldiers viewed their unit leaders to be somewhat more supportive of families (as measured by this scale) than did

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<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed discussion on scale construction of these and other scales used for AFRP analyses, see the AFRP Analysis Plan, Volume II (RTI, Caliber, & HumRRO, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> For the Soldier Separation Anxiety Scale, a *higher* scale score means *lower* anxiety.

**FIGURE 20**  
**MEASURES OF UNIT LEADER FAMILY SUPPORT**

<b>UNIT LEADER FAMILY SUPPORT SCALES</b>
<p><b><u>Soldier</u></b> scale based on responses to:</p> <p>"To what extent do the following apply to the leaders at your unit or place of duty?"</p> <p><b><u>Spouse</u></b> scale based on responses to:</p> <p>"To what extent do the following apply to the leaders at your spouse's place of duty?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The leaders of my [spouse's] unit encourage unit-wide family activities</li><li>■ The leaders of my [spouse's] unit know about Army family programs</li><li>■ If war broke out, the leaders of my [spouse's] unit would be concerned about the welfare of their soldiers' families</li></ul> <p>Individual items in the scale range from 1, "not at all," to 5, "very great extent." The range for each scale is from 3 to 15.</p>

spouses. The correlation between soldier<sup>35</sup> and spouse unit leader family support scale scores was significant though not strong ( $r = .30$ ).

### **Informal Support Systems**

In this section we present the findings from analyses using two additional pairs of scales developed for AFRP research. The first pair of scales, described in Figure 21, measures the extent to which soldiers and spouses feel they have a "community network" to count on. To some extent these scales can be viewed as bridging the distinction between "formal" and "informal" support systems since two of the items used to create the scales relate to resources within the Army system (a leader at the soldier's place of duty and staff of an Army service agency). The majority of the scale elements, however, refer to more "informal" sources of support and are thus presented in this section. The second pair of scales measures the extent to which soldiers and spouses feel they have social support resources available to them. These scales are described in Figure 22, following Figure 21.

The Spouse Survey introduces the section from which these scale items are drawn with: "People often look to others for companionship, assistance, or other types of support." As this can be especially true during family separations, it was hypothesized that a strong sense of community and social support might help to mitigate separation worries and coping problems. Although these community and social support scales do not explicitly address needs for support *during separations*, soldiers and spouses with better community and social support systems available may experience less separation anxiety or predict fewer coping problems when the soldier is away, as measured by the Separation Anxiety and Separation Coping Scales.

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<sup>35</sup> For this analysis, the "soldiers with spouses" data set was used.



**FIGURE 21**  
**MEASURES OF SOLDIER AND SPOUSE COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

**SOLDIER COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORK SCALE**

Scale based on responses to:

"To what extent can you count on the following people for help with a personal or family problem?"

- A leader at your place of duty
- Someone else you work with
- A neighbor or friend who is in the Army
- A neighbor or friend who is not in the Army
- Staff of an Army service agency (e.g., ACS or Chaplain)
- Parents or other close relatives (not your spouse or children)

Individual items in the scale range from 1, "Not at all," to 5, "Very great extent." The range of the scale is from 6 to 30.

**SPOUSE COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORK SCALE**

Scale based on responses to:

"To what extent can you count on the following people for help with a personal or family problem?"

- A leader at your spouse's place of duty
- A neighbor or friend who is an Army spouse
- A neighbor or friend who is not an Army spouse
- A co-worker of yours
- Staff of an Army service agency (e.g., ACS or Chaplain)
- Parents or other close relatives (not your spouse or children)

Individual items in the scale range from 1, "Not at all," to 5, "Very great extent." The range of the scale is from 6 to 30.

**FIGURE 22**  
**MEASURES OF SOLDIER AND SPOUSE SOCIAL SUPPORT**

**SOCIAL SUPPORT AVAILABILITY SCALES**

**Soldier and Spouse scale based on responses to:**

**"At your current location, is there a friend, neighbor, or relative (besides your spouse) outside your home who will:"**

- Listen to you when you need to talk
- Go with you to do something enjoyable
- Help with your daily chores if you are sick
- Lend you household tools or equipment
- Make a short-term loan of \$25.00 - \$50.00
- Provide transportation when you need it

Individual items in the scale range from 1, "No," to 3, "Yes, always." The range of the scales is from 6 to 18.

To examine whether these two types of support systems were related to separation anxiety and coping, Pearson correlations were used, resulting in four correlations for soldier scales and four for spouse scales. All eight were significant although the correlations were small. The results are presented in Table 13.

**Table 13**  
**Separation Anxiety And Coping Scales**  
**Correlated With Social Support and Community Network Scales**

	<u>Social Support Availability Scale</u>	<u>Community Support Network Scale</u>
<b>Soldier</b>		
Separation Anxiety	$r = .148 (R^2 = .022)$	$r = .144 (R^2 = .021)$
Separation Coping	$r = .134 (R^2 = .018)$	$r = .160 (R^2 = .026)$
<b>Spouse</b>		
Separation Anxiety	$r = .173 (R^2 = .030)$	$r = .085 (R^2 = .007)$
Separation Coping	$r = .176 (R^2 = .031)$	$r = .096 (R^2 = .009)$

Among the relationships tested, the strongest were between the two separation measures for spouses and the availability of social support (that is, the existence of a friend or relative who will help out, do things together, listen to problems, etc.). Less strong, though still significantly correlated, were the relationships between the two spouse separation measures and the community network scale. For spouses, at least in the context of separations, the extent to which they feel they can count on various people for help with a personal problem (community network) would appear to be less important than the *existence* of a friend, relative or neighbor who would help out (social support availability).

Soldiers, on the other hand, appear to make less of a distinction between the two types of support. Moreover, with respect to predictions of their spouses' coping problems, the strength of their scale score relationships is reversed from that of the wives. For soldiers, the relationship between the Community Support Network Scale and predictions of spouse separation coping problems is *stronger*

than that of the Social Support Availability measure and predictions of spouse coping problems. This would suggest that the extent to which soldiers *perceive* there is someone they could count on to help out with a problem may be somewhat more reassuring to them than whether or not they have a friend or relative available to talk to or do things with. Perhaps the key distinction between these results for soldiers and spouses, however, is the fact that the Community Network Scale includes two items which refer to resources within the formal Army system (a leader at the soldier's place of duty and staff of an Army service agency), resources on which the soldier may place more confidence than does his spouse to help out when he is away.

### Summary

Both the separation literature (e.g., Bell and Quigley, 1991) and these findings suggest that support systems for separated families are extremely important elements of a "successful" separation experience. Formal Army systems in the form of policies, programs, services and unit leaders all play a role in supporting the separated soldier and family. The majority of soldiers and spouses said they believed it was "very useful" for the Army to provide services for separated families and spouse programs during TDYs and deployments. Although reported usage of these programs at the respondents' current location was low (a finding for which there are several plausible explanations), their perceived value is not in dispute. Family Support Groups (FSGs), for example, which are not specifically identified in the questionnaire but clearly constitute a "program for spouses during TDYs and deployments," have been shown to be a critical factor in promoting social support for spouses during a wartime deployment<sup>36</sup> (Bell and Quigley, 1991; Teitlebaum et al., 1989).

The extent to which unit leaders are viewed as supportive of families was positively associated with reduced separation anxiety and predicted separation coping problems for both soldiers and spouses. Unit leaders' attitudes were more

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<sup>36</sup> Their value or effectiveness for helping during routine TDY or deployment separations is not as fully documented.

strongly correlated with soldier separation measures than with spouses'. (Soldiers also rated unit leaders somewhat more attuned to family needs than did spouses.)

Informal support systems also play a role in sustaining families during separations. The existence of a close friend or relative, and the extent to which soldiers and spouses believed there was someone they could count on to help out with a problem both were associated with reduced separation anxiety and coping problems.

## **Conclusions and Implications for the Army**

This report provides the Army with detailed information, based on a large probability sample, on the nature and extent of family separations that result from Army duty, the types of soldiers likely to experience separations, and how they are experienced by the soldiers and families. Because virtually all soldiers, whether married or single, can expect to spend time away from home during their Army careers, this information should prove valuable to policy, command and program personnel in developing and implementing support services that can best serve separated soldiers, their families and the Army.

### **Importance of Separation Issues to the Army**

The reality of deployments and separations for military families was truly underscored during the Desert Shield/Storm troop deployments to the Middle East in the fall of 1990. Moreover, despite a warming trend in the cold war, to the extent that higher proportions of troops are stationed in CONUS in the future, the need for deployments most likely will not diminish, and may increase (Orthner & Bowen, 1990). The data from the analyses presented in this report indicate that family separations are widespread and frequent:

- Approximately 90% of all married male soldiers who were residing with their spouse were away from home at least one night during a six month period, and more than half (58%) were gone for two weeks or more.
- More than a third (37%) of married soldiers reported an "extended" separation (one month or longer) in the previous 12-month period. Most of these separations (64%) were between one and two months; about one-fifth were five months or longer.
- Roughly 3% of married male soldiers are not living with their families either because they are on unaccompanied assignments or because they are voluntarily separated.

In each of these separation categories, enlisted personnel experience the highest rates of family separation and are the most likely to report separation-related

problems. Because the wealth of evidence suggests that *how* separations are experienced by the family may affect how well they adapt to the demands of Army life, the Army stands to realize significant long-term retention and readiness dividends by investing in programs and policies that foster successful separation experiences.

### Targeting Separation Services

Soldiers in Combat and Combat Support units are the most likely to experience both "overnight" and extended separations. Soldiers in TDA units were the least likely to report being away from home, but when they did experience an extended separation they were more likely than members of the other types of units (Combat, Combat Support, Combat Service Support) to be gone for five months or more.

Lower rank, young marriages, young children, and financial difficulties were the factors most frequently associated with measures of separation problems. Since length of marriage, age of children and financial problems are all associated with rank, these are important and practical characteristics for the Army to use in targeting separation services. Data presented in this report indicate that in all probability, the first extended period away from home will occur sooner rather than later in a soldier's career, and to the extent soldiers marry early in their careers,<sup>37</sup> young families will therefore be experiencing separations.

Those potentially in most need of support or services during separations, therefore, include:

- Spouses and families of junior enlisted soldiers (Private to Corporal)
- Junior enlisted personnel (or others) where financial problems are likely to be experienced or known to exist

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<sup>37</sup> Data presented by Orthner (1990) indicate that soldiers are more likely to be married at a young age than are their civilian age peers.

- Families who are experiencing their *first* Army-related separation, especially when the wives are very young and/or have very young children.
- Families who recently have PCS'd to a new location and joined a new unit, especially when the other factors identified above are present, or when there are signs that the new family is not well-integrated into the new unit.

An additional indicator of potential separation problems, though difficult to target on a wide scale, is existing strain in a couple's marriage. In order to avert potentially serious reunion problems, it may be incumbent on the soldier's supervisor (or co-workers) to be alert to this potential separation stressor.

### Providing Effective Separation Assistance

Although the majority of married soldiers and their spouses thought it very useful for the Army to provide separation services and programs, few reported having used them. Because of these limited reports of use and the fact that the exact nature of the services and programs listed in the questionnaires was unspecified, it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions about them other than to say in general, services of this type are *perceived* as valuable. Nonetheless, the separation literature and findings from this report suggest several specific areas where separation support services would benefit the families.

Unit-based support services appear to offer the most access and impact, both before and during separations. Before the separation, units can help prepare families both instrumentally and emotionally. At this point, the most valuable function the unit can serve is to provide information and guidance in a variety of areas, including, for example:



- Ensuring that the spouse and family understand the purpose and importance of the job the soldier is performing while he is away from home
- Preparing the families for the soldiers' possible death or injury, if appropriate, given the nature of the deployment (Orthner & Bowen, 1990)
- Accessing the types of assistance and services available to the families (e.g., medical, financial, legal, personal, etc.)
- Obtaining a will and power of attorney, and encouraging the soldier to make other financial arrangements to ensure the family's solvency during the separation
- Dealing with children in the soldier's absence, and where to go to get help if problems with the children require assistance
- Alerting families about and discussing the changes that often occur in family roles and relationships, how to prepare for them and deal with them when the soldier returns
- Reminding families that they are not alone, especially for first-time separations ("misery loves company," and it helps to know that others have survived, and even grown personally, during separations).

Not all of these steps need to be undertaken by busy unit personnel themselves. Many pre-deployment services can be provided by other Army agencies/personnel at the unit's request. Army Community Service (ACS) in particular can play a key role in providing information and assistance to both unit leaders and families. It is important, however, that the individual unit be the driver of the process and that families are aware of the unit's active role in easing the separation experience. Data from these analyses indicate that both the soldier's and spouse's perception of the unit leaders' support for families is related to separation coping. With several extended separations under their belts, more senior personnel in the unit may be inclined to minimize or dismiss the potential stresses or difficulties of an impending separation, which could adversely affect the families' perception of support from unit leaders.

During separations, the unit's role as a source of information continues to be important, but the unit also becomes a potential key source of social support as well. As such, the most effective unit-based services appear to be the Rear Detachment Commands (RDCs) and Family Support Groups (FSGs). During separations the RDC can serve as a central point for families to obtain information about the soldier and about services they may require.

The FSGs, on the other hand, have been shown to be extremely effective means of providing unit-centered social support that deserve increased attention and implementation that deserve increased attention and implementation. Although clearly the Army cannot force anyone to have friends, findings from these analyses of AFRP data suggest that the existence of a friend or neighbor, on whom one can rely for companionship and assistance, is related to separation coping. Young, newly relocated or isolated families may require special outreach efforts, for example, to get them linked into social and community support networks. Data from Desert Shield/Storm research will provide more information about the specific functions and types of support services these groups provide, but to date they have revealed themselves to be valuable resources for assisting separated families cope with separation stresses.

### Future Research

The analyses conducted for this report were primarily exploratory. They were intended to provide a better understanding of separation frequency and the different types of separation problems experienced by different soldiers and families. While these AFRP data are somewhat limited by virtue of their cross-sectional nature and the lack of specific information about the separations reported, they nonetheless offer considerable opportunity for additional analyses, most importantly, significant modeling of factors associated with key separation outcomes. For example, insightful models of soldier and spouse separation worries could be developed using not only the two Separation Anxiety Scales, but also the individual items they comprise. Separate models of the soldier's assessment and the spouse's assessment of the separation experience should be developed. This type of information would be invaluable to service providers in

developing support programs to help separated families avoid working at "cross purposes" to each other during and after separations. Army factors in addition to unit leadership should be further tested, including a number of variables in both survey instruments dealing with soldier and spouse perceptions of the Army environment and its supportiveness of families. Future research should emphasize factors over which the Army has some influence and should seek to further identify the determinants of a successful separation experience.

Additional analyses with the AFRP data, as well as findings from the considerable research on Operations Desert Shield/Storm currently underway should provide useful insight into answering the following key separation-related questions:

- What is the specific contribution of FSGs and other *Army*-provided support systems to reduced separation stress? What specific types of services are lacking?
- How do the soldier's and spouse's attitudes about the soldier's job and the Army in general affect the separation experience?
- To what extent does pre-deployment "preparation" (i.e., other than the three forms discussed in this report, power of attorney, joint checking, and emergency cash) mitigate separation stress?
- How do various aspects of the separation itself (e.g., unknown length, reason for the separation, including the real possibility of combat<sup>38</sup>) affect how the separation is handled and experienced?
- How do spouses and families cope on a day-to-day basis (i.e., what do they actually *do*--what coping mechanisms are used--that worked and could be modeled for assisting future separated families with like characteristics)?
- Who had reentry problems and why? What steps can be taken before or during separations to minimize or avert serious reunion problems?

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<sup>38</sup> As previously noted, because of the time frame in which the data for this research were collected (February to October, 1989), none of the separations reported was likely to have had a serious risk of combat associated with them.

This combination of additional analyses on the substantial AFRP baseline database and significant combat-related deployment and separation data provides the Army an excellent opportunity to further understand and respond to the real challenges of Army family separations.

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## APPENDIX A

### FAMILY SEPARATIONS METHODOLOGY

This section provides more technical information on the methodology used for this report.

#### Data Sets Used

All analyses used the Soldier and Spouse interview data from the 1989 Army Soldier and Family Survey. Three data sets were created:

1. All Married Soldiers Data Set. This data set contained all male soldiers (Question 10 = 1) who said they were married (Question 92 = 1 or 2) to civilian wives (DUALIND = 2). Analyses using this data set were weighted by the survey Soldier Weight except for one analysis in which the supervisor rating of readiness was analyzed and the survey Soldier Readiness Weight was used.
2. Soldiers with Spouses Data Set. This data set consists of a subset of the first and includes only those soldiers for whom there is a matched spouse questionnaire (using the encrypted ID). Analyses using this data set were weighted by the survey Spouse Weight.
3. Spouse Data Set. This data set consists of all female civilian spouses of soldiers included in the "All Soldiers" data set.

#### Analysis Method

All analyses were completed using SUDAAN Version 5.52. SUDAAN is a statistical program that takes into account the sample design in estimating variances. In the Army Soldier and Family Survey, the sample design was a three-stage cluster sample. Most computer programs (e.g., SAS and SPSS) assume simple random or stratified random (weighted) sampling. Use of these programs to analyze AFRP data would generally underestimate the sampling variance, and, therefore, produce incorrect statistical tests. SUDAAN uses a Taylorized expansion series to obtain variance estimates close to the true values.

Several methods of analysis were used in the study. Estimated population frequencies were produced using SPSSPC Version 4. No statistical tests were reported for these estimates.

A number of the analyses presented in this report are crosstabulations (two-way tables of association). Crosstabulations were estimated using the SUDAAN CROSSTAB procedure. All crosstabulations presented, unless otherwise stated, produced a Chi-Square with a value significant at the .01 level.

Many of the analyses conducted were one-way analysis of variance or, in the case of continuous variables, simple regressions. These analyses, in addition to the multiple regressions which were estimated, were carried out using the SUDAAN REGRESS procedure. Unless otherwise noted, the ratio of each regression coefficient to its standard error (t-statistic) is significant at the .01 level.

Finally, comparison of soldier-spouse variables were made using the SUDAAN RATIO procedure. This procedure produces an estimate of the ratio of two variables and the standard error of the estimate. For categorical variables, the ratio is formed as follows:

$$R = \frac{\text{Proportion in Category n of the numerator variable}}{\text{Proportion in Category d of the denominator variable.}}$$

The test used to determine whether two variables differ from each other used the following ratio:

$$Z = \frac{\text{Absolute\_Value (1-R)}}{\text{Standard\_Error\_of-R}}$$

This ratio (Z) was compared to the normal distribution. If the value was greater than (.995), then the difference between the variables was concluded not to have occurred by chance. (This procedure produces a two-tailed test at the .01 level of significance.)

A significance level of .01 was chosen for all analyses to ensure that relatively few of the analyses reported would be significant by chance. Were a higher level of significance chosen (e.g., the .05 level), readers might have been reluctant to rely on the results presented.

### Variables

This section discusses the way in which the original variables on the two questionnaires or variables which had been created for the overall survey sample were recoded for use in this report. Not discussed here are recodes of bad data, multiple responses, and skips to missing values.

1. Soldier-spouse living status, from Soldier Question 118 recoded to:
  - 1 = unaccompanied (i.e., soldier on unaccompanied tour)
  - 2 = spouse will soon join me
  - 3 = couple is voluntarily separated (collapse of categories 3-8)
  - 4 = couple not separated
  
2. Number of years married, from Soldier Question 99:
  - 1 = less than one year
  - 2 = 1 year
  - 3 = 2-3 years
  - 4 = 4+ years
  
3. Family Life Course (FLC1) from created variable FLC:
  - 1 = no children
  - 2 = youngest child < age 5
  - 3 = youngest child  $\geq$  age 5
  
4. Number of children, from Soldier Question 136:
  - 1 = no children
  - 2 = 1 child
  - 3 = 2+ children
  
5. Spouse employment status, from Soldier Question 111:
  - 1 = full time
  - 2 = part time
  - 3 = not working (collapse of categories 3-5)
  
6. Number of months at current location, from Soldier Question 120:
  - 1 = 0 through 6 months
  - 2 = 7 through 12 months
  - 3 = 13+ months

(category 4 when necessary = spouse not living with you)

7. Number of nights away in last 6 months, from Soldier Question 121:
- 1 = 0 nights
  - 2 = 1-7
  - 3 = 8-15
  - 4 = 16-30
  - 5 = 31 +
8. Length of last extended separation, from Soldier Question 123:
- 1 = 1-2 months
  - 2 = 3-4 months
  - 3 = 5+ months
  - 4 = No separation
9. Items in both surveys (Soldier Question 129 and Spouse Question 66) about whether they have a power of attorney, joint checking, and 2 weeks' pay available were recoded to 1 = yes and 2 = no, with "don't know" responses included in category 2.
10. Children with problems, from Soldier Question 139 ("I have a child living with me who has... a) a serious behavior problem; b) a serious problem with school; c) a serious medical problem."):
- 1 = yes (if any of 139A-C = yes)
  - 2 = no (if all of 139A-C = no)
11. Housing situation, from Soldier Question 159:
- 1 = on post
  - 2 = off post (collapse of questionnaire categories 2-5)
12. Money problems, from Soldier Question 67 in which soldiers were asked, "In the last 12 months, how many months, if any, have you not had enough money to pay your bills?":
- 1 = 0 months (i.e., no "money problems")
  - 2 = 1+ months (collapse of questionnaire categories 2-5)

13. Soldier Question 125 and the Spouse Question 61 had response categories which effectively constituted a five-point scale. These were collapsed for use in crosstables as follows:

1 = very great or great extent (questionnaire categories 1-2)  
2 = moderate or slight extent (questionnaire categories 3-4)  
3 = not at all (questionnaire category 5)